

Path Development in Tourism Destinations: The Interplay of Agency, Institutions and Path Dependence in the Global South



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Summary

The study of industrial path formation has become a key focus within evolutionary economic geography (EEG), providing important insights into how new industries and economic activities emerge, develop, and become territorially embedded. However, much of this research is based on experiences from the Global North, which often emphasise technologically advanced sectors and stable institutional settings. This emphasis risks generalising theoretical assumptions that overlook the structurally weak conditions influencing the emergence and development of industrial paths in the Global South, especially in post-colonial Southern Africa. Theoretically, economic geography draws on two main schools of thought (EEG and institutional economics) and, more recently, human agency to explain why and how industries emerge and why some regions succeed more than others. Nevertheless, much of this work lacks awareness of the particular complexities of path formation in peripheral regions characterised by colonial legacies, institutional hybridity, and fragile socio-economic circumstances.

This PhD thesis aims to address this significant gap in the literature by advancing our understanding of path formation. In this context, tourism offers a powerful yet underexplored perspective through which to examine how paths are formed in the Global South. As an industry that is both territorially embedded and globally connected, tourism often involves multiscale actors who influence spatial and institutional arrangements, either reinforcing or challenging dominant industrial paths. Therefore, studying tourism has the potential to enhance theoretical insights into path formation, providing a clearer understanding of the dynamic between structure and agency, and illustrating how new industrial trajectories are collaboratively shaped through power-laden processes of change.

Against this backdrop, this dissertation firstly explores the role of agency in the uneven evolution of three tourism destinations (Zambezi in Namibia, Chobe in Botswana and Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe). Building on the Trinity of Change Agency (TCA) concept, it advances a multi-scalar perspective on institutional entrepreneurship to demonstrate how different forms of agency shape regional path formation during critical junctures. Focusing on the end of colonialism as a specific trigger event, which opens new opportunity spaces. More importantly, it demonstrates the critical role of the nation-state as a powerful actor in path emergence and growth, which, through institutional entrepreneurship, enhances the capacity of actors to leverage their agency. This role is crucial because in these contexts, the quality and quantity of actors needed for transformation may be absent at the regional level. The initiatives of the state

also depend on the presence of capable place-based leaders, which means that the interplay between the state and local actors is crucial for the emergence of paths in post-colonial contexts.

Secondly, the thesis examines the path-dependent and historically contingent nature of tourism trajectories in Southern Africa, with a focus on Victoria Falls. Using the concept of Coloniality of power, it provides a compelling empirical example of ongoing continuities within the contemporary tourism industry in Victoria Falls. Tourism paths across Sub-Saharan Africa and the Global South remain connected within the historical web and imaginaries of colonial power dynamics. These dynamics limit their scope for alternative trajectories. Thirdly, the thesis demonstrates how EEG and Agency perspectives are currently limited in explaining path formation due to their evolutionary focus. In this context, it examines how future-oriented visions, narratives, and imaginaries influence the evolution of tourism paths. Using the case of the Kavango Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area (KAZA), it illustrates how agentic mobilisation of specific resources in early path formation can enable actors to achieve their future goals. KAZA is the largest conservation region globally, established in early 2011 as a single premium tourist destination by integrating extensive landscapes and reconnecting ecological systems across national borders. By examining how KAZA was conceptualised, the imaginaries created around it, the various actors involved, and how their shifting perceptions influenced the adoption of specific technologies and the emergence of tourism-related activities and diversification processes, we can observe the causal power of imaginaries and how collectively held images of the future unfold, thus enabling actors to coordinate their decisions. Overall, the thesis contributes to a nuanced understanding of industrial path formation, and it expands and pluralises theoretical frameworks that underpin path formation. It concludes that the development of regional tourism paths is a complex path-dependent evolutionary process, shaped by the interplay of multi-scalar change agents—their ability to recognise and act on opportunities, navigate institutional reforms, and overcome structural constraints.

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List of Abbreviations

AfCFTA	African Continental Free Trade Area
AWF	African Wildlife Foundation
BSAC	British South Africa Company
CBNRM	Community-Based Natural Resource Management
CBTA	Cross-Border Tourism Area
CEDA	Citizen Entrepreneurial Development Agency
CFA	City of Victoria Falls
CRC	Collaborative Research Centre
EEG	Evolutionary Economic Geography
FDG	Focus Group Discussions
GVC	Global Value Chains
IRDNC	Integrated Rural Development and Nature Conservation
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
KAZA-TFCA	Kavango Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area
LEA	Local Enterprise Agency
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PPF	Peace Park Foundation
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SAGCOT	Southern Agricultural Growth Corridor of Tanzania
TALC	Tourism Area Life Cycle
TBCA	Transboundary Conservation Areas
TCA	Trinity of Change Agency Concept
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation
UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Organisation
WBNLDC	Walvis Bay Ndola-Lubumbashi Development Corridor
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature
ZPWMA	Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority

1. Introduction

Tourism is increasingly recognised as a key industry for job creation and economic growth (Gauna Ruiz de León et al., 2025; Monnier, 2021; UNWTO, 2022). Globally, the sector accounts for 8.8% of total employment and approximately 9.1% of global investment, totalling USD 652 billion (Christie et al., 2013). In Africa, tourism remains a high priority on the policy agenda, as reflected in the SADC 2020-2030 Tourism Program (SADC, 2019) and the African Union Agenda 2063 (African Union, 2015). Following the disruptions caused by COVID-19, Africa's tourism sector has demonstrated remarkable resilience, recovering 96% of pre-pandemic international arrivals by 2024 (UNWTO, 2024). The stated vision of Southern African countries that are part of the KAZA-TFCA is to enhance their regional tourism portfolios and integrate into the KAZA transboundary region to create a single premium destination attractive for investment and tourism traffic within the African region (KAZA, 2019).

While the KAZA partner countries share similar histories of settler colonialism and are united by a spatial imaginary of a conservation region's spectacular wildlife and fauna, they exhibit significant variation in valorising their tourism potential, despite these similar structural conditions (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2018). Extant research has provided narrative accounts of the uneven geography of tourism in Africa (Rogerson, 2014) and its general regular occurrence. The general spatial organisation debate of tourism is limited in expanding our knowledge of why some tourism regions are more competitive than others (Visser, 2007; Visser & Hoogendoorn, 2012). Secondly, emerging studies on the African tourism business have shown that “disarticulations in economic and social upgrading are a gendered and racial process that perpetuates social difference and hierarchy” (Christian, 2015, p. 25). These disarticulations lead to differences in value capture and participation between local and international tourism actors, thereby affecting opportunities for economic and social upgrading (Kalvelage et al., 2022). Resultantly, two blind spots emerge: explanations for the uneven emergence of tourism destinations and the racialised dynamics that affect value capture and participation.

The first gap relates to the broader economic geography research, which is marked by debates on the relevant theoretical and conceptual frameworks for explaining why some regions grow more (or less) than others with similar structural preconditions (Grillitsch & Sotarauta, 2020). Similarly, tourism studies are increasingly concerned with examining the conditions and forces behind the emergence and evolution of regional tourism economies (Butler, 2024; Brouder &

Erikson, 2013; Brouder, 2014). Dominant theories on regional industrial path creation emphasise the emergence of new industries or paths through existing dense regional networks and structures, characterised by a confluence of knowledge bases, vibrant entrepreneurial cultures and innovative firms (Boschma & Frenken, 2011; Jolly et al., 2020). They argue that the distribution of economic activities across space results from "contingent, yet path-dependent, historical processes" (Boschma & Frenken, 2011, p. 296), while institutional theory emphasises region-specific formal and informal institutions as setting strong preconditions for regional development opportunities (Todtling & Trippl, 2005; Rodríguez-Pose, 2013). New approaches to path development now emphasise the critical role of change agency (Baekkelund, 2021; Benner, 2023; Blazek & Kveton, 2022; Grillitsch & Sotarauta, 2020; Isaksen et al., 2019).

The challenge with these studies is threefold. Firstly, many of the aforementioned studies are dominated by case studies from the Global North (or Core regions), resulting in a lack of sufficient insights into the unique experiences and nuances of path development in structurally weak regions of the Global South (Breul & Pruß, 2022; Grillitsch et al., 2025). Notably, the roles and forms of agency crucial for the emergence of economic activities in such contexts remain understudied. New path formation is likely to be complicated by enduring colonial continuities, limited resources and dependence on external actors, which may not be interested in change and transformation. Secondly, much of the literature on agency assumes the presence of capable actors, including in peripheral regions. However, in many post-colonial African states, this is not always the case due to a weak organisational context for agency. Building the capacity of local actors to identify and seize opportunities takes time, which in turn shapes the development of growth paths. This is particularly important because the necessary number and quality of actors for transformation may be lacking at the regional level. As a result, the nation-state must play a crucial role in strengthening actors' capacity to exercise agency effectively. Such nuances of path development dynamics are mainly unexplored and therefore the subject of this thesis. Thirdly, most studies of path development rely on explanations of evolutionary processes, ignoring the causative power of the future imaginaries. Consequently, very little has been said about the potential influence of future narratives, visions, and imaginaries on the rise and growth of new industrial paths (Benner, 2024; Hassink et al., 2019; Gong, 2024). As Beckert (2013, p.219) rightly observes, "actors are motivated in their actions by the imagined future and organise their activities based on these mental representations". These mental representations can therefore also be considered a source of creativity in the economy. It is

therefore imperative to understand how agents imagine and give meaning to changes in their spatial context.

The second key gap addressed in this thesis explores the role of power, discourses, and representations in shaping tourism pathways (Bianchi, 2009; Ateljevic et al., 2007). Even as new tourism paths emerge in complex post-colonial contexts, they often remain embedded within colonial imaginaries of travel and tourism. This results in the selective concentration of capital in certain locations and among specific actors while excluding others. Existing literature on African tourism rarely examines the historical connections between colonialism and contemporary global tourism value chains. Understanding these historical foundations is crucial as they shape the structural conditions that influence the exercise of agency in tourism development. To move forward with this debate, I adopt the concept of *coloniality*, which helps uncover the continuities between the colonial past and the present-day racialised and hierarchical global order (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). Coloniality operates as an invisible power structure that perpetuates asymmetrical power relations between the Global North and the Global South, as well as between black and white actors at the local level. Coloniality manifests itself in four dimensions, including through the control of the economy (*land appropriations, exploitation of labor, and control of African resources*); control of subjectivity and knowledge (*epistemological colonialism and re-articulation of African subjectivity, or thought inferior by a series of deficits and lacks*); control of authority (*maintenance of military superiority and monopolisation of means of violence*); and control of gender and sexuality as well as the introduction of western-centric education which displaces Indigenous knowledge (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012). By examining these dynamics, I contribute to an understanding of the global racialised nature of tourism by connecting contemporary global value chains (GVCs) to their historical contexts.

Accordingly, this dissertation pursues the following research questions:

- a. What forms and combinations of agency are vital for path creation in a global south context?
- a. How do history and colonialism influence value capture and participation in tourism value chains?
- b. How do actors shape and leverage future visions or imaginaries to drive the emergence and growth of tourism pathways?

Empirically, I employed a multi-site, mixed-methods approach to examine the emerging tourism pathway (Jenkins et al., 2018; Friedberg, 2001). Using cross-case comparisons and explanation-building strategies, this multi-site case study method integrated various observational and analytical techniques across five countries: Angola, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Namibia, and Zambia. For qualitative analysis, I employed path tracing, which involved key informant interviews, focus group discussions, content analysis of newspapers, magazines, and reports, as well as image analysis. Additionally, I incorporated quantitative data from immigration records, national park entries, tourism associations, and companies operating across the five countries. By combining these methods, this study offers a comprehensive contextual analysis and serves as a heuristic tool for broader application in research on tourism path development in similar settings.

The remainder of this dissertation is structured as follows: The next section of Chapter 1 unpacks the overarching conceptual framework that connects the three empirical and theoretical chapters. This overarching framework provides a deeper understanding of the connections between structure and agency, as well as how these two concepts mutually influence each other. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 present the main research findings through individual articles. Finally, the last chapter presents a thesis synthesis, concluding the findings. This chapter goes beyond a simple synthesis – it provides a deeper conceptual analysis, policy implications of the findings and a discussion on the future research agenda in which I reflect on alternatives to tourism and conservation. This topic was not the primary focus of the thesis, but it is a pertinent issue that emerged during the research process.

2. Conceptual Framework: Tourism Path Development in Structurally Weak Regions

In this section, I present the overarching conceptual framework of this thesis, which integrates the three approaches employed in the individual articles and summarises the conceptual contributions. To avoid repeating concepts discussed in detail in the empirical chapters, I focus on the intersecting ideas underlying the theories presented. The framework is structured as follows: First, I provide a brief context of African tourism and the tourism production system in general, including definitions which situate and contextualise the conceptual framework. Secondly, I examine the relationship between economic geography and the evolution of tourism destinations, and then I discuss the development of tourism paths. This foundation is anchored in three key concepts: human agency, institutions, and path dependency. Building on these ideas, I demonstrate how the development of regional tourism economies in post-colonial African states is a complex, path-dependent evolutionary process. This process is shaped by the interplay of multi-scalar change agents—their ability to recognise and act on opportunities, navigate institutional reforms, and overcome structural constraints.

2.1 The Tourism Production System: Setting the Context for African Tourism

Development Paths

In the global profile of tourism geographies, Africa is the least represented, yet it holds considerable potential for both scholarship and economic development (Rogerson & Visser, 2011). The World Bank has categorised tourism destinations in Africa into four categories: pre-emerging, potential, emerging, and consolidating, among 47 African destinations. Out of these, only eight have achieved significant success and employ 4% of the tourism workforce; 10% of these could achieve success, with 15 left behind (Christie et al., 2013). Much of the tourism research in this direction points out the variations in the evolution of tourist destinations. However, very little has emerged in terms of explanations for why some destinations are more successful than others. The notion of tourism as a potential path for economic growth is increasingly debated, but only a few voices are emerging to question its heavy colonial dependencies and its uneven evolution. Given that conservation is a significant business in Africa, it seems plausible to assume a certain co-evolution with tourism (Buscher, 2013). Nature Conservation is entangled within complex multi-scalar dynamics which affect how tourism spaces are negotiated and governed. To set a clear context for a geographical view

of tourism and its place in industrial path evolution, it is necessary to understand first what it means and the concept of its production system.

Surprisingly, tourism is difficult to define and understand as a distinct industry worth exploring in geographical terms. This is because tourism is not a discipline but a subject for academic study (Tribe, 1996). Early definitions understood tourism as “the theory and practice of touring, travelling for pleasure” (Netto, 2009). UNWTO's official definition describes tourism as “comprising the activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes not related to the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place (1991). Despite this latter broad definition, it appears that tourism research has primarily focused on travel for pleasure at the expense of other forms of tourism (Butler, 2015). Nonetheless, the essence of tourism lies in a combination of factors that convey both the typology of tourism and the broader industry itself. What is clear, however, is that tourism is a distinct industry with distinct inputs – the tourist experience as an image, investments in place, and labour, as represented through the work of operators. While the tourist is at the centre of the value chain, the tourist experience is the product (Judd, 2006). Ultimately, the spatial embeddedness of African tourism and its unevenness justify an exploration of the micro-influences on its evolution (Brouder & Eriksson, 2013). Such an approach promises to inform our understanding of path evolution in peripheral regions.

2.2 What is the relationship between Economic Geography and Tourism Destination Evolution?

The tourism production system has historically held a peripheral position in economic geography. Over the decades, geographers have examined various aspects of tourism, including travel patterns, land-use implications, and the social and cultural impacts on destination areas (Dimitri, 1995). However, tourism's role in the global economy has expanded significantly over the past few years. In 2024, approximately 1.4 billion international tourists (overnight visitors) were recorded worldwide, marking an 11% increase from 2023, equivalent to an additional 140 million visitors (UNWTO, 2025). Furthermore, international tourism receipts reached USD 1.6 trillion in 2024, indicating a 3% rise from 2023 and 4% above 2019 levels (in real terms). Notably, tourism receipts had already returned to pre-pandemic levels by the end of 2023 (Twining-Ward et al., 2025). A similar trend is observed in Africa, with international arrivals

reaching 96% of pre-pandemic levels. Such a trajectory has motivated a growing body of research that attempts to understand the dynamics of tourism destination evolution over time (Butler, 2024; Brouder & Eriksson, 2013; Brouder, 2014; Shaw & Williams, 2002). Increasingly, new analytical approaches in economic geography, particularly evolutionary economic geography (EEG), are adopted that have broadened our understanding of how tourist destinations evolve in different regions (Sanz-Ibáñez & Anton Clavé, 2014). This body of literature also makes a significant contribution to the understanding of new path development in economic geography.

Despite this resurgence, the role of tourism in economic geography or regional industrial restructuring remains poorly theorised (Ioannides & Brouder, 2016). This is partly because considerable geographical literature on theoretical issues in industrial dynamics and their relationship to regional changes has concentrated overwhelmingly on manufacturing while ignoring service industries (Debbage & Daniels, 1998; Ma & Hassink, 2013). This seems fortuitous as apparent organisational similarities between tourism and manufacturing services warrant investigation. For example, “the tourism industry uses similar input factors as the manufacturing industry. In this respect, tourism is not only a resource-based industry but also inherently represents a market-based grouping of economic activities” (Hassink & Ma, 2016, p. 65). However, despite this lacuna, a conceptual relationship can still be discerned between economic geography and tourism. The area life cycle model, a pioneering framework in tourism, draws first from the product life cycle model in geography. Further modifications of this model by Richard Butler draw heavily from EEG concepts, particularly path dependence (1980; 2024). EEG concepts have faced criticism in economic geography and tourism due to their rigid, narrow and deterministic approaches, which render social agency, motivation and strategy largely invisible in new path development processes (Steen, 2016).

Theoretically, economic geography has evolved with the emergence of a literature that seeks to explore the role of human agency in path development. Agency processes are non-deterministic and thus view the structural constraints in society, which would include relations of dependency in development, as not being absolute and unconditional (Chaperon & Bramwell, 2012). Tourism has also recently relied on these conceptualisations (Benner, 2022; Clivaz et al., 2014) to understand the evolution of destinations, showing that tourism can be a “dynamic, socially constructed and negotiated process that involves many social actors (Verbole, 2003, p. 152). Finally, as Brouder et al. (2017) observe, concepts from EEG, Agency, and economic geography aid in interpreting the role of tourism as a means of accumulating

capital in destinations and its implications for the dynamics of economic variety, environmental (in)equity, and social justice.

2.3 Conceptualising New Path development in Tourist Destinations

New path development examines how industries and economic activities emerge and grow within regions. It recognises that the trajectory of a new regional path can evolve and adapt over time (James, Halkier, & Vorre, 2025). Scholars have identified several forms of path development, including extension, upgrading, diversification, and creation (Martin et al., 2019; Hassink et al., 2019). More recent work highlights the “dark side” of this process, introducing concepts like path downgrading, contraction, and delocalisation (Blažek et al., 2019). These latter terms describe the decline or relocation of existing activities and the de-locking of assets within specific development trajectories. In this thesis, I build on three contrasting but interconnected concepts of path development: evolutionary economic geography, with a focus on path dependence; institutional theory; and the more recent concept of human agency, as building blocks towards a broader conceptualisation of path development. Together, these three are crucial for understanding path development in general, but particularly in a Global South context.

2.3.1 The Path-Dependent Nature of Tourism Path Evolution

The process of destination evolution in peripheral regions relies heavily on the economic geography literature concerning path development. Earlier conceptual frameworks regarding destination development (Gilbert, 1939; Wolfe, 1952; Christaller, 1963) emphasised the role of tourism demand as the primary driver of economic and spatial change. As Brouder et al. (2017, p. 4) observe, “many of the pioneering studies on destination development revealed that the impacts of tourism are linked to specific stages of destination development,” which motivated the understanding that processes of rejuvenation relate to and can evolve with changes in visitors' habits and preferences. In parallel with this view, a growing body of studies on tourism has focused on the role of fluctuations in visitor numbers, alongside the provision of services and infrastructure for tourism, in driving destination development (Brey et al., 2007). As noted above, one of the key concepts that derive from this thinking is the Tourism Areas Life Cycle. This model frames the evolution of tourist destinations using a lifecycle model, suggesting an S-curve and six stages: exploration, involvement, development, consolidation, stagnation, and subsequent outcomes, ranging from rejuvenation to decline. It

drew its inspiration from earlier models by Gilbert (1939) and Christaller (1963), who formulated a three-stage model of the evolution of resorts, progressing from discovery to growth and decline. In this way, this model was built on a narrow and basic logic of evolutionary approaches. However, it was not until the *Tourism Geographies* publication (Volume 16, issue 4) that scholars (Ionannides, Halkier & Lew, 2014; Brouder, 2014; Ma & Hassink, 2014, for example) and later in 2017 that Patric Brouder and others made a clear conceptual link to understand the role of EEG in destination development (Brouder et al., 2017). EEG seeks to understand the forces driving economic change, adaptation, and innovation in the spatial organisation of production, distribution, and consumption. It also examines how these spatial structures, in turn, influence the dynamics of economic evolution (Boschma & Martin, 2007). Within EEG, three theoretical perspectives have been identified (Generalised Darwinism, Complexity Theory and Path dependency) (Brouder & Erickson, 2013).

Path dependency has emerged as the popular go-to concept in destination development (James et al., 2023). Within the context of path dependence, two schools of thought have emerged. Firstly, in the canonical model, path dependence emphasises the significance of historical conditions, routines, and institutional inertia, arguing that initial conditions and random events influence the initiation of particular path trajectories. In turn, “these processes are reinforced by a variety of increasing return effects, which further entrench the dominant path, eventually leading to a stable, self-producing but rigid state” (James et al., 2023, p. 1821). In other words, a path-dependent process or system is one whose outcome evolves as a consequence of the processes or system’s history, leading to a lock-in (Martin & Sunley, 2006). Only an external shock would be able to break this lock-in. The second perspective argues that “a geographical location ... can be thought of as having a memory that directs the path of subsequent development” and thus “innovation is indeed often a highly localised phenomenon, dependent on place-specific factors and conditions” (Martin, 2010). It sees ‘path as a process’. It conceptualises path development as a ‘process that might lead to stasis but could also lead to dynamic adaptation that leads to further growth in a new round of path formation, creation and development’ (Benner, 2022, p. 3). The existing industrial structure of a region, therefore, influences the emergence of new activities through different types of spinoffs and firm diversification activities. As Boschma & Frenken (2011) observe, the externality of firm technological relatedness affects the nature and scope of knowledge spillovers among regional firms, which ultimately influence the emergence of new activities branching out from existing

ones. It also argues that economic activities are built on the existing composition of industries. It thus foresees a wide range of possibilities or forms of path development (Isaksen & Trippl, 2017). Several critiques have emerged regarding path-dependent concepts, specifically their inability to fully explain the emergence and evolution of paths (Martin & Sunley, 2006). Notably, the assumption in path dependence is that path creation is a random or accidental occurrence of history, which leaves no room for the purposive role of economic agents (Garud & Karnøe, 2001). They also ignore the role of other regional actors and the role of future expectations (Steen, 2016)

Both Path-dependent approaches have been crucial for interpreting and explaining the emergence and evolution of tourism destinations (Brouder & Ericksson, 2013). The evolutionary paths of tourist destinations have been seen to be essentially contingent, open-ended, and non-deterministic, emergent and continually transforming (Sanz-Ibáñez & Anton Clavé, 2014). Several seminal studies in tourism (Ma & Hassink, 2012; Russell & Faulkner, 1999; Papatheodorou, 2003) have made important connections between tourism and path dependency, highlighting both conceptual and empirical links. For example, in a case study of the emergence and consolidation of tourism in the Gold Coast in Australia Ma & Hassink (2012, p97) observed that it was, “not only due to “historical matters” or “random events” such as policy or triggers, but also depended on “initial conditions,” including preexisting natural or cultural resources, adventurers’ experience, location advantage and economic base”. Furthermore, institutional rigidity (related to product obsolescence) was identified as one of the primary causes of negative lock-in, showing the complexity of the evolution processes of tourist destinations.

2.3.2 The role of institutions in path formation and destination development

The second concept builds on the weakness of path dependence, which relates to open questions about the development of new paths. Despite the strong explanations provided through path dependence, accounting for preconditions and history, for example, a large proportion of regional growth paths remains unexplained (Rodríguez-Pose, 2013; Grillitsch & Sotarauta, 2020). One of the open questions relates to ‘how region-specific formal and informal institutions, as well as the embedding of the region in a multi-scalar institutional architecture, set strong preconditions for innovation and thus regional development opportunities’ (Grillitsch & Sotarauta, 2020). Formal institutions refer to rules, laws, and organisations, while informal institutions refer to things such as individual habits, group routines, social norms, and

other cultural practices that moderate human interaction (Amin, 1999; Rodríguez-Pose, 2013). However, as Sanz-Ibáñez & Anton Clavé (2014) observe, institutions do not necessarily affect stakeholder behavior in a deterministic way. Instead, they act as elements that enable or constrain the strategic choices made by stakeholders in a given situation. This means that institutions exert a pervasive influence on the evolution and nature of regional economies (Gertler, 2010).

These structures – or institutions are socially produced and reproduced over time to provide stability and predictability, and this enables basic economic functions like production, distribution and consumption in an orderly way (Polanyi, 1944). Polanyi's seminal work challenged established thinking about the free market and the role of economic actors. It established the understanding that “economies that are recognizably capitalist in orientation nevertheless evolve along distinctive paths that are shaped by their particular constellations of institutional structures– their distinctive institutional architectures” (Gertler, 2010, p.30). The literature on regional innovation systems has built upon this institutional logic to demonstrate the role of regional institutions (Rodríguez-Pose, 2020; Rodríguez-Pose & Storper, 2009). Economic geography has evolved in its institutional turn, observing that “the form and evolution of the economic landscape cannot be fully understood without giving due attention to various social institutions on which economic activity depends and through which it is shaped” (Martin, 2003, p.77). Furthermore, economic geography views institutions as characterised by inertia and durability, and therefore exhibits path dependence, meaning they tend to evolve incrementally over time. These institutional dependencies are particularly more pronounced at the regional level because they are seen as carriers of local economic histories (Martin, 2003). However, such views are limiting; they overemphasise the constraining role of institutions as particularly rigid and path-determining, which excludes the role of agency (MacKinnon et al., 2009) or instances of rapid institutional transformation. The question, therefore, is how these institutions enable or constrain destination evolution, and how they can explain the rapid changes in tourist destinations, given their emphasis on stability. Ultimately, the blind spot is the role of agency.

2.3.3 The role of agency in new path formation

The third and final concept pertains to the role of agency in the emergence and evolution of destinations. It is a concept that scholars have recently proposed as a more comprehensive explanation, beyond path dependence and institutional forces, of why and how change has

arisen in some places, while others have remained locked in their past. Agency is understood as an ‘embedded process of social engagement, informed by the past ... but also oriented toward the future’ (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 962). Agency concepts acknowledge the existence of pre-existing conditions and the history of a region, viewing them as sociological constructs, but focus on the role of individual decisions and behaviours in determining regional outcomes (Dinmore et al., 2023). These individuals or actors occupy different roles at different scales, which means there are both local and non-local sources of influence on regional development (Hassink et al., 2019). A further conceptualisation argues that it is not just the actions of individuals that matter, but also how their expectations shape regional paths. Consequently, there are various approaches to understanding agency, including firm-level and system-level agency. Other scholars also differentiate between agency and agents to provide clarity on actions that produce the desired effect and the actors exercising this agency (Jolly et al., 2020, p. 177).

Path development should be seen as a long-term sequence that includes episodes of path development interrupted by occasional episodes of transformation (Benner, 2023). These episodes are driven by agentic action within a changing, stable, or structural context. This allows for an analysis of the changing roles of agency over time (Sotarauta et al., 2022). However, the recent and comprehensive contribution to an agency perspective includes that of Grillitsch & Sotarauta (2022), which emphasises three forms of agency: institutional, entrepreneurial, and place-based leadership, all combined into one approach. Much of this recent work has tended to focus on change agency, but Baekkelund (2021) and Jolly et al. (2020) have introduced a new dimension – reproductive agency. This type of agency focuses on ‘people's actions that do not produce change or produce less radical change’ (Baekkelund, 2021). It can be seen as resistance to novel activities or can exist independently of them. Tourism scholars have also adopted these agency concepts, although there is a strong tendency towards change agency.

2.4 Towards a comprehensive approach to understanding new path development in tourism destinations in Southern Africa

The above discussions highlight the conceptual interdependence of the three concepts, which justifies the need to adopt a broader perspective on the emergence and evolution of the destinations. As noted in the introduction above, it is the particular nuances of path dependence,

institutions, and agency that inform a southern perspective on path development in a tourist destination. These concepts have been conceptualised and tested mainly in high-income or global north countries. Southern Africa is “a particularly harsh and difficult place where regional development is needed most, but also challenging to achieve” (Grillitsch et al., 2025). As shown above, path dependence refers to how initial conditions, past decisions and historical events influence the direction of regional economic development. The history of colonialism in Southern Africa set the initial conditions for tourism development in these regions. Colonial conservation models in the early 1900s played a crucial role in shaping the production of space and places for leisure consumption (Büscher & Fletcher, 2014; McGregor, 2003). These spaces prioritise conservation for tourism that was envisioned in Eurocentric models, which marginalised indigenous populations (Ramutsindela, 2007). Subsequent infrastructure investments in parks and other tourism spaces led to spatial lock-ins, resulting in the dominance of certain places over others (Acemoglu, Simon, & James, 2001). For over a century, most of these paths have remained entrenched in dominant tourism narratives that may not allow for diversification into new economic trajectories. These dominant narratives, driven by international NGOs, including WWF, UN agencies, for example, lead to lock-ins and uneven development of tourism economies.

Continuities in colonial institutions mean that only a shock or trigger could cause these paths to diverge. The end of colonialism is seen here as a significant trigger event that opened new opportunity spaces for the exercise of agency. In terms of colonial institutions, for instance, these include land tenure systems (Moyo, 2013), which preserve legacy ownership of tourism areas, as well as top-down tourism institutions that hinder black and indigenous ownership and participation. However, current tourism trajectories suggest that in some locations, paths have progressed beyond inertia and path lock-in, while in others, new directions have emerged (Rogerson & Visser, 2011). The strategic roles of human agency and the innovativeness of various actors indicate that path dependence and institutional theories alone cannot fully explain the current variations in tourism growth across Southern Africa. This shows that human agency must complement these explanations to demonstrate how it diverges from entrenched paths. Although institutions are rigid and exhibit inertia, they are not fixed, and significant changes have occurred in many areas. Ultimately, it seems reasonable to assume that new path development depends on or arises when human agency operates within and reshapes institutional structures and historical constraints. This involves place-based leadership, institutional entrepreneurship, and innovative entrepreneurship agency, which collectively

mobilise the region to overcome its negative dependencies and institutional inertia. Accordingly, this study foregrounds the role of human agency in the evolution of tourism destinations. What is unclear is what forms and combinations of human agency are necessary for paths to emerge, thrive, decline and transform. Secondly, current conceptualisations of agency adopt an evolutionary approach and therefore lack insights into how the future is shaped or shapes the actions of economic actors at the regional level. As James et al (2023), observe EEG actors do not only respond to current circumstances but also anticipate future developments which leads to an acknowledgement of the ‘capacity of people to make, debate and respond to forecast, to anticipate risks and vulnerabilities and change behavior to preempt or mitigate losses’(Bristow & Healy, 2014a, p. 928). Recent work on imaginaries in sustainability transitions by Benner (2024, 2025) and the role of the future by Gong (2024) conceptualises these concepts. With increasing uncertainties, geopolitical instabilities, and climate risks, outbreaks of pandemics like COVID-19 have led tourism actors to shape the viability of different paths actively. Thirdly, how do colonial path dependencies ensnare paths and make it difficult to break from lock-ins? I answer these broad questions in the three empirical sections of the thesis. The broader perspective, therefore, is agency and co-evolutionary path development in tourist destinations: Analysis of the role of different forms of agency within the region's structural context, and the role of the future in path development.

3. Research Design: Studying Path Development in Southern Africa

Researching the emergence and development of destinations in post-colonial contexts is intricate. This thesis considers both historical and future perspectives, requiring a methodological approach that integrates notions of path dependence, institutional co-evolution, multi-scale agency-driven interactions and territorial embeddedness. It employs both a critical realist perspective (recognising the aforementioned structures and actors), process tracing, structured narrative analysis, and subjective discursive meanings through which tourism future pathways are negotiated. This approach enables an examination of how structures constrain actors and how actors work to shape the very same structures in which they are embedded.

3.1 Case Selection: Understanding the context

The Kavango Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area (KAZA) presents a compelling case for examining tourism development, both as a single case study region and as a multi-site case study in the individual country regions, to facilitate a more detailed regional analysis. In KAZA, we find five country regions that share a history of settler colonialism, which allows for cross-country analysis. The tourism industry has evolved since the beginning of colonialism in the late 19th century, but it became more prominent after independence, starting around the 1960s. The KAZA region evolves unevenly in various prominent ways, with Victoria Falls emerging as a top destination that attracts over 500,000 tourists annually. The tourism industry here has evolved with Victoria Falls being established in the early 1900s. However, it was not until the country's independence that the government of Zimbabwe, which views tourism as a driver of economic development, introduced mass tourism policies, leading to new forms of tourism development emerging. Given the over 250 high-value actors, this region presents an ideal case for understanding path dependencies, institutions, and the roles of various actors (Zimbabwe Tourism Authority, 2020). Secondly, Botswana has a distinct institutional context compared to the other five countries in the KAZA. Botswana's colonial experience was relatively distinct compared to other African countries as it was a British protectorate from 1885 to 1966, which combined colonial authority and self-governance, allowing for minimal extractive settler colonial rule (Parson, 1984). This has important implications for how institutions have evolved and influence the formation of paths. As Chapter 4 of the thesis demonstrates, Botswana's tourism path did not evolve as a rupture from colonial rule but rather

as a gradual branching path shaped by institutional entrepreneurship and place-based leadership (Acemoglu, Johnson, & Robinson, 2002; Good, 1992).

This sharply contrasts with the spatial and developmental trajectory of Zambezi in Namibia, which attracts fewer than 20,000 visitors despite sharing world-class animal populations and other natural resources, such as the Zambezi River. Tourism in Zambezi developed in tandem with the implementation of CBNRM policies that emerged following independence in 1990. The region has been geopolitically peripheral, yet its strategic role has rendered it a militarised position during direct German and South African-led colonialism. The region's tourism path is shaped by a combination of path dependence and path discontinuity, driven by weak territorial integration, underinvestment, and fragmentation. Livingstone, as the Colonial Capital of Zambia, shares similar trajectories with Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe, given the proximity. However, Livingstone has faced decline over the years due to underinvestment and neglect, which has allowed activities like poaching to thrive. Angola is part of the KAZA but was not analysed owing to the security situation in the province. The tourism industry in the region is still in its infancy and remains heavily influenced by the 27-year civil war. These countries individually and collectively provide a melting pot of institutional dynamics and histories that can enrich the study of tourism. Given the dominance of conservation narratives which coevolve with tourism, the KAZA provides a suitable case study.

3.2 Methodological approach

The methodological approach is embedded within the broader Collaborative Research Centre TRR228 phase two Future Rural Africa project (<https://www.crc228.de/>) sub-project “Future in Chains (C01).” This project focused on analysing how cross-border growth corridors influence the territorial configuration of value chains and examining to what extent local value-chain actors can harness growth-corridor dynamics to create desirable futures. These questions are addressed within two growth corridors, SAGCOT and the WBNLDC. In this context, my research on the tourism value chain responded to the overarching questions outlined below.

Following the tradition of economic geography research, this study employed mixed methods with a strong emphasis on qualitative approaches (Pike et al., 2016). The overall inquiry was guided by a qualitative path-tracing methodology, which aims to identify and explain the causal mechanisms linking events, agency, and structures (Sotarauta & Grillitsch, 2022, p.3; 2023). My objective was to gain a deeper understanding of the critical role of actors—their agency, expectations, and the resources they require—in shaping regional development. Each paper in

this study employed this approach in conjunction with a combination of strategies and data sources.

For example, in Phase 1 (as shown in Table 1), the approach primarily involved key informant interviews and document analysis. In Phase 2, I introduced Global Value Chain (GVC) mapping and analysis, incorporating GIS analysis to identify enterprise locations concerning value capture. In Phase 3, I incorporated qualitative methodologies for studying spatial imaginaries, which included document analysis, image building and analysis, media representations, and public discourse analysis. The objective was to understand how future visions, such as spatial imaginaries, drive path development. Given the multi-site nature of the study, these various approaches were necessary to gather comprehensive data to answer the relevant questions.

Table 1: Guiding Research Questions

Site	Guiding Question	Article	Methods	Publication status
KAZA- (Angola, Botswana, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Zambia	How do actors shape and leverage future visions or imaginaries to drive the emergence and growth of tourism pathways?	Harnessing the Future for Cross-Border Tourism Development in Southern Africa	Path tracing, Media Reports, images, narrative analysis, tourist movement data	Under Review
Botswana, Namibia and Zimbabwe	What forms and combinations of agency are vital for path creation in a Global South context?	Nation-state influence on tourism path creation in Southern Africa	Path-tracing, Key informant interviews, Focus group discussions, and content analysis	Published in Regional Studies, (Mlilo et al., 2024)
Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe	How do history and colonialism influence value capture and	Coloniality of power and the imaginaries of	Path-tracing, Value chain mapping and analysis,	Published in <i>GeoForum</i> ,

	participation in tourism value chains?	tourism in Victoria Falls	document analysis, key informant interviews, GIS mapping	(Mlilo et al., 2024)
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I employed a multi-site, mixed-methods approach to examine the emergence and evolution of tourism pathways (Jenkins et al., 2018; Freidberg, 2001). This multi-site case study utilised cross-case comparisons and explanation-building strategies, integrating various observational and analytical techniques across five countries: Angola, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Namibia, and Zambia—all part of the Kavango Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area (KAZA-TFCA), one of the world’s largest conservation regions. The trans-local nature of tourism in Southern Africa heavily influenced this research methodology. Regional destinations like Victoria Falls or the Chobe in Botswana are deeply interconnected through shared colonial histories and cross-border tourism dynamics (Elkins & Pedersen, 2005; Kuper, 149-164). Tourists frequently travel between Victoria Falls, Botswana, and other parts of the KAZA region, making these mobilities central to the study. These cross-border linkages mean that the multi-site approach is not just a comparative analysis of different locations but an exploration of how tourism pathways evolve within an interconnected regional system. As Jenkins et al. (2018) observe, “In collecting data from multiple settings with similar methods and procedures, multisite qualitative case studies have aimed to enhance transferability and trustworthiness of findings to other contexts ...”. The following research questions guided the study;

- a. What forms and combinations of agency are vital for path creation in a global south context?
- b. How do actors shape and leverage future visions or imaginaries to drive the emergence and growth of tourism pathways?
- c. How do history and colonialism influence value capture and participation in tourism value chains?

3.3 Case Study selection and justification

This study focused on three levels of analysis: KAZA-TFCA as a single site. I treated the entire KAZA-TFCA region (comprising all five member countries) as a single site, examining the emergence and evolution of cross-border tourism. Secondly, when comparing three member countries, I analysed the uneven tourism development in Botswana, Namibia, and Zimbabwe, exploring differences in tourism growth and policy approaches. Thirdly, Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe – I conducted an in-depth case study of Victoria Falls to investigate value capture and participation in tourism value chains. While each site had its specific focus, I applied a standard set of overarching research questions across all three to develop a comprehensive contextual understanding of regional tourism dynamics. Table 2 below shows the three sites within a site.

Table 2: multi-site representation

Site	Guiding Question	Article	Methods	Publication status
KAZA- (Angola, Botswana, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Zambia	How do actors shape and leverage future visions or imaginaries to drive the emergence and growth of tourism pathways?	Harnessing the Future for Cross-Border Tourism Development in Southern Africa	Path tracing, Media Reports, images, narrative analysis, tourist movement data	Under Review
Botswana, Namibia and Zimbabwe	What forms of and combinations of agency are vital for path creation in a global south context?	Nation-state influence on tourism path creation in Southern Africa	Path-tracing, Key informant interviews, Focus group discussions, content analysis	Published in Regional Studies, (Mlilo et al., 2024)
Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe	How do history and colonialism influence value capture and participation in	Coloniality of power and the imaginaries of tourism in Victoria Falls	Path-tracing, Value chain mapping and analysis, document analysis, key	Published in <i>GeoForum</i> , (Mlilo et al., 2024)

	tourism value chains?		informant interviews, GIS mapping	
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All sites are within the KAZA TFCA, which offers a compelling case study of the emergence and evolution of tourist destinations. KAZA is the largest conservation area in the world by landmass, covering over 200,387 square miles and with an estimated population of over 2.7 million people. Its long-term goal is to become a premier cross-border tourism destination. The individual papers explain detailed justifications for the selection of each case area.

3.4 Research Process

The research process was divided into three phases, each culminating in the publication of an article, as shown in Table 2. Data was collected in the Zambezi region (Namibia), Chobe (Botswana), Victoria Falls (Zimbabwe) and Livingstone (Zambia) during three periods: August 2022–February 2023, July–August 2023, and February–March 2024. Data processing, analysis, and publication occurred during these phases.

Phase 1: Exploration and familiarisation (May–August 2022)

During the exploration phase, I was introduced to the CRC-C01 *Future in Chains* project at the Phase 2 launch in Windhoek, Namibia. This event also provided an opportunity to engage with various stakeholders involved in the project. These included researchers at the University of Namibia's Katima Campus, the KAZA Secretariat, the Namibia Tourism Organisation, Ministry officials in Namibia, and businesspeople in the Zambezi region. I conducted an extensive literature review of publications by other scholars within the research group working on similar topics. Additionally, I developed a comprehensive research proposal that included a research framework, proposed research tools, and an extensive list of key informants.

Phase 2: Fieldwork One (August 2022–February 2023)

This phase involved fieldwork in three countries, Botswana, Namibia, and Zimbabwe, to conduct a comparative study on the uneven emergence of tourism paths. Data collection was conducted in two parts. The first part focused on constructing a timeline of events and developing a deeper contextual understanding through desk research. This was followed by key informant interviews with policymakers, a review of company reports, and meetings with key institutional actors such as mayors, regional council chairpersons, tourism business

associations, and relevant ministries. I concentrated on firm representatives, research experts, and tour guides in the second part. I also visited national archive centres to understand the emergence of paths. I also conducted focus group discussions to triangulate the data collected from interviews. In total, I conducted 68 interviews and three focus group discussions. Based on this extensive fieldwork, I published a paper, as shown in Table 2.

Phase 3: Fieldwork two (July-August 2023)

In this phase, my work was built on findings from Phase 2, where I identified significant value capture inequalities among various actors, particularly along racial lines and between local and international stakeholders. I selected Victoria Falls as my case study because it is a top tourist destination, generating substantial profits and hosting over 253 enterprises. This micro-focus allowed for a deeper understanding of value capture and participation. I employed Global Value Chain (GVC) mapping and analysis to analyse the tourism industry's structure. GVC mapping involves identifying the entities and their geographic locations contributing to a product or service's journey from conception to final consumption. This includes firms, products, activities, stakeholders, and locations. In contrast, value chain analysis focuses on understanding the "what" and "why", examining how governance, institutions, and interfirm relationships influence the trajectory, growth, and competitiveness of a product or service (Frederick, 2019, p. 31). The mapping process was conducted through qualitative path tracing and documentary analysis, while GVC analysis incorporated GIS to examine the spatial distribution of companies in relation to key tourism sites. By applying coloniality theory, I could analyse the nature of tourism activities, how they are framed, the geographical placement of firms, and their historical connections to Victoria Falls.

Phase 4: Fieldwork three (February- March 2024)

In this phase, I aimed to understand the progress toward a single premium destination as envisioned by KAZA. Therefore, I focused on KAZA as a single case and conducted research directed at the five member countries. I conducted 63 interviews and four focus group discussions. In this phase, I combined qualitative path tracing with qualitative approaches for researching imaginaries, such as discourse analysis and image analysis (Kothari & Wilkinson, 2010; Weisser, 2014). This phase aimed to understand how actors build imaginaries and the resources they mobilise to realise their goals.

3.4 Data analysis and triangulation

The data were analysed using the methods outlined in Table 3, and further details are provided in Chapters 4, 5, and 6.

Table 3: Data analysis techniques

Article	Analysis
Nation-state influence on tourism path creation in Southern Africa	Qualitative- Content & structured narrative analysis Data: Reports, Enterprise turnover, interview transcripts
Coloniality of power and the imaginaries of tourism in Victoria Falls	Thematic qualitative analysis, structured narrative analysis Data: GIS locations, Reports, archives, Interview transcripts
Harnessing the Future for Cross-Border Tourism Development in Southern Africa	Structured narrative analysis Data: Interview transcripts, Immigration data on tourist movements, National Park entry data

Activity		2022				2023				2024				2025			
		1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
1	Exploration and Familisation																
	Proposal development																
	CRC Project Launch																
	Literature Review																
2	Fieldwork One																
	Visit to Botswana, Namibia and Zimbabwe																
	Data analysis and publication																
3	Fieldwork Two																
	Visit to VicFalls -Zimbabwe																
	Data analysis and publication																
4	Fieldwork Three																
	Visit to four countries- Bots, Nam, Zam and Zim																
	Data analysis and publication																
5	Thesis writing																

Figure 1: Activity Timeline

4. Nation-State Influence on Tourism Path Creation in Southern Africa

Source: Mlilo, M., Bollig, M., & Revilla Diez, J. (2024). Nation-state influence on tourism path creation in Southern Africa. *Regional Studies*, 59(1).

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Abstract

This paper explores the role of agency in the emergence and evolution of tourism paths in the post-colonial states of Southern Africa. Building on the trinity of change agency concept, we emphasise the critical role of the nation-state by spotlighting the multi-scalarity of institutional entrepreneurship and the impact of triggering events. These elements are essential for understanding the decisive forms of agency that can redirect tourism economic paths at pivotal moments. This approach is adapted to explain the uneven evolution of tourism paths across the border regions of Chobe, Victoria Falls and Zambezi. Our findings suggest that the interplay between regional actors and a responsive nation-state during periods of change plays a crucial role in shaping the development of tourism paths.

KEYWORDS: Agency, tourism; path creation; triggering events

4.1 Introduction

Economic geography research is increasingly concerned with why some regions grow more (or less) than others with similar structural preconditions (Grillitsch & Sotarauta, 2020). Building on this agenda, a similar strand of research examining the emergence and evolution of regional tourism economies has also started to develop (Brouder, 2014; Belay & Adu-Ampong, 2023). Prevailing economic geography research on regional industrial path creation traditionally emphasises the emergence of new industries or paths through existing dense regional networks and structures, characterised by a confluence of knowledge bases, vibrant entrepreneurial cultures, and innovative firms (Jolly et al., 2020; Boschma & Frenken, 2011).

Nevertheless, a discernible shift in recent years is evident, marked by an increasing emphasis on an agency-centric perspective in regional industrial restructuring (Grillitsch & Sotarauta, 2020; Baekkelund, 2021; Isaksen et al., 2019; Benner, 2023; Blazek & Kveton, 2022). This

conceptual shift is pivotal for counterbalancing the predominant structure-focused debates on industrial change that have long dominated evolutionary economic geography studies (Sotarauta et al., 2022; Isaksen & Trippel, 2017). Despite the expanding literature on agency in path creation, it predominantly consists of case studies from the Global North, thereby lacking sufficient insights into the unique experiences and nuances of path creation in structurally weak regions of Global South (Breul & Pruiß, 2015), and Southern Africa in particular (Belay & Adu-Ampong, 2023; Breul et al., 2021; Rogerson, 2015). Notably, there seems to be little research on what role and the forms of agency are crucial at “the specific moments at which tourism economic paths are forced to shift direction, be this through the creation of new paths or the appearance of a more subtle incremental change over time” (Sanz-Ibáñez et al., 2016, p. 81). The result is that very little is known about the role and forms of agency vital for and the structural conditions under which tourist paths emerge and grow in such contexts.

This article redirects attention to peripheral regions in Southern Africa, specifically Zimbabwe, Botswana, and Namibia. These Southern African (SA) countries share similar histories of settler colonialism (Elkins & Pedersen, 2005). They grapple with persistent continuities from colonial legacies and ongoing development challenges, characterised by low levels of industrial clustering, low levels of knowledge generation and diffusion, frequently encounter situations of lock-in and a relatively thin organisational context for agency compared to certain peripheral regions in the Global North (Todtling & Trippel, 2005; Engerman & Sokoloff, 1997). Despite their shared histories and similar structural conditions, these countries exhibit significant variation in valorising their tourism potential. Therefore, the question arises: To what extent can the purposeful and intentional interplay of efforts by tourism stakeholders and responsive nation-states during critical junctures explain the differences in the tourism trajectories of the border towns of Chobe, Victoria Falls, and Zambezi? Answering these questions enhances our understanding of the role of agency in path creation, especially since the dynamics of agency in these contexts are not well-researched.

Theoretically, we build on existing conceptualisations of agency in path creation by sharpening Grillitsch and Sotarauta's (2020) Trinity of Change Agency Concept (TCA). We focus specifically on the multiscale of one of its parts - institutional entrepreneurship and the role of triggering events to develop a conceptual framework for explaining tourism path creation in Southern Africa. We, therefore, respond to their call for “... an investigation of the agentic processes, their embeddedness in multi-scalar networks and institutional contexts, which are behind shaping regional growth paths” (Grillitsch & Sotarauta, 2020, p. 718). This approach

enables us to underscore the critical role of the nation-state, which has been largely overlooked in post-colonial empirical contexts. In essence, we argue that given the constraints of Southern Africa's industrial contexts and the daunting challenge of overcoming post-colonial structural deficiencies, nation-state-driven institutional change is crucial for driving local change processes and the creation of opportunity spaces.

While multiscalar institutional entrepreneurship is not new in economic geography (see, for example, Käsbohrer et al., 2024; Dawley et al., 2015; Grillitsch & Rekers, 2016; Benner, 2022), we build on these existing conceptualisations to highlight not only the relevance of the TCA in explaining path creation processes but also its applicability to challenging contexts in Southern Africa. Moreover, our study addresses the prevailing literature's bias towards manufacturing industries by emphasising service-based industries. In our research, the end of colonialism is seen as a significant trigger event (Sanz-Ibáñez et al., 2016). By adopting a multiscalar approach, we demonstrate how the nation-state capitalises on this pivotal moment to create opportunity spaces, thereby facilitating the path-creation process. Therefore, the decisive factor for path creation is the interplay between regional and national actors. The subsequent sections of this paper will unfold as follows: first, we present the theoretical framework; next, we present the methods employed in our study; followed by the empirical findings, the discussion, and lastly, we draw conclusions based on our research outcomes.

4.2 Conceptual Framework: Agency in Path-Creation

The emergence and transformation of new industrial paths continues to be a debated subject in economic geography, given that cohesive conceptual frameworks and theories needed to explain this process are still developing (Martin & Sunley, 2006; Steen, 2016; Grillitsch & Sotarauta, 2020). Evolutionary economic geography (EEG) has emerged as a potent theory, asserting that the distribution of economic activities across space results from "contingent, yet path-dependent, historical processes" (Boschma & Frenken, 2011, p. 296). EEG proposes that industrial paths can emerge through a branching process when firms and industries diversify into technologically related activities. Branching processes are considered fundamental mechanisms for path creation (Steen, 2016, p. 1608), and regional industrial development is viewed as endogenous, shaped by a region's past economic development (Martin & Sunley, 2006). In contrast, institutional theory, prominent in regional innovation systems literature, suggests that formal and informal institutions establish preconditions for innovation and path

creation (Grillitsch & Sotarauta, 2020). However, these mechanisms have been criticised as narrow (Blazek & Kveton, 2022), neglecting non-local sources, other regional actors (Hassink et al., 2019, p. 4; Baekkelund, 2021, p. 759), and the role of future expectations (Brown & Michael, 2003) in path creation. We review the recent conceptualisations of the agency below and present our entry point.

4.2.1 Change agency in path creation

The process of path creation is defined as follows: “A new path is created in a region if it contains a set of functionally related firms and supportive actors and institutions that are established and legitimised beyond emergence and facing early stages of growth, developing new processes and products” (Binz et al., 2016, p. 177). In this context, agency pertains to how economic and other actors create, recreate, and modify these developmental paths (Martin, 2014). It is crucial to distinguish between agents and agency; while agency is fundamentally concerned with actions that produce the desired effect, agents represent the actors exercising this agency (Jolly et al., 2020; p.177). Studies on agency predominantly concentrate on endogenous forces due to their pronounced territorial dimension (Martin & Sunley, 2006). However, recent research highlights the significant role of extra-regional linkages, indicating that non-local actors wield agency that influences regional development. Consequently, a noteworthy distinction can be drawn between local and non-local actors in regional development (Baekkelund, 2021, p.759; Binz et al., 2016; Hassink et al., 2019).

A crucial differentiation in the types of agency at play lies between firm-level and system-level agency (Isaksen et al., 2019). Firm-level agency involves actors establishing new firms or introducing innovative activities within existing companies. Conversely, system-level agency pertains to actors who play a role in transforming innovation systems. However, agents may wield their agency to reproduce existing structures, prioritising "existing norms and beliefs" over supporting novel activities (Jolly et al., 2020, p.179). This particular mode of agency is termed structural maintenance or reproductive agency (Baekkelund, 2021), underscoring our emphasis on change agency. Change processes take time, and hence, it is crucial to adopt a long-term historical perspective of agency, building on Martin's (2010) path-as-a-process model; Benner (2023) introduces path in a discontinuity model for the analysis of agency and path creation at critical junctures.

4.2.2 The Trinity of Change Agency in the post-colonial African States

Summary of the trinity of change agency

The above conceptualisations in the study of agency bring us to the TCA. This concept amalgamates three forms of agency: Schumpeterian innovative entrepreneurship, institutional entrepreneurship, and place-based leadership into one approach (Grillitsch & Sotarauta, 2020). These forms of agency are conceptually distinct and transformative, and primarily concerned with path-breaking actions and forming new ones.

Schumpeterian innovative entrepreneurship finds its roots in the entrepreneurship literature. Schumpeter (1942) contended that dynamic and thriving economies witness a ceaseless cycle of death and birth of firms. This cycle depends on entrepreneurs, who serve as the engine of economic change, sparking path-breaking innovations (Block et al., 2017). The Schumpeterian innovative entrepreneur is characterised by their confidence and a willingness to innovate, ‘to chart unknown territory, to venture where no one else has dared before’ (Weik, 2011, p. 470; Schumpeter, 1942). Notably, innovative entrepreneurship arises from the interaction between individuals and opportunities. Specifically, opportunities driven by knowledge, technology, or research are vital to innovative entrepreneurship (Block et al., 2017). It is important to note that innovation in the tourism industry is understood differently than in most innovation literature. We rely on the typology presented by Booyens and Rogerson (2016, p. 516) to identify innovations in tourism. These include but are not limited to introducing new or improved products (such as new tours, attractions, or facility upgrades), new marketing strategies (like the introduction of social media), and organisational branding that can attract new visitors or enhance value, destination appeal, or profits.

New industrial growth paths necessitate supportive institutional changes as innovative entrepreneurship flourishes in environments conducive to its emergence. Innovative entrepreneurship, an endogenous force, thrives when institutions foster entrepreneurial activity (Schumpeter, 1942). This underscores the necessity for “risk-taking and opportunity-oriented institutional entrepreneurship” as another form of agency (Grillitsch & Sotarauta, 2020, p. 708). The activities of innovative entrepreneurs are entrenched in institutions known to influence the innovativeness and competitiveness of regions (Grillitsch & Sotarauta, 2020). Therefore, actions aimed at transforming or establishing new institutions can be crucial for emerging regional growth paths. Consequently, organised actors who utilise their resources to

initiate and implement these institutional changes are conceptually termed institutional entrepreneurs (Battilana et al., 2009, p. 68). These actors could be individuals or groups, or organisations or groups of organisations (Garud et al., 2002).

Place-based leadership is critical in mobilising various actors at multiple levels towards a collective regional growth agenda. Influential leaders, not necessarily in formal positions, must deeply understand regional assets and be committed to the region's advancement, prioritising strategic regional needs over personal interests (Grillitsch & Sotarauta, 2020, p. 713). Lastly, the TCA conceptualises opportunity spaces to connect the above agency concepts with structure, which mediates between the two (Grillitsch & Sotarauta, 2020, p.10). Agents are thought to be embedded in an opportunity space that is region-, industry-, and time-specific. Opportunity spaces signify what is possible for entrepreneurs within a particular time and circumstances created by place-based or institutional actors.

4.2.3 Towards a Conceptual Framework for Tourism Path-Creation using the TCA

The TCA has primarily been applied in the Global North, and it is questionable whether and under which conditions it is applicable to a Southern African context. These conditions relate to the quality and quantity of local actors and the historical structural conditions that impact the exercise of agency. Additionally, it is only recently that path creation studies have focused on service sector industries, with tourism being a key component. While much of tourism activities in Southern Africa can be traced back to the era of colonialism (Arrington-Sirois, 2017; Gissibl, 2019; Harrison, 2000), the pathways were characterised by exclusivity, designed mainly for Europeans and American travellers, which constrained their broader expansion. Beyond colonialism, tourism driven by new forms of global transport and migration flourished (Baranowski et al., 2015) in most post-colonial African states but faltered in others, which begs the question of the impact of the moment of the end of colonialism. How did this moment trigger the creation of new opportunity spaces, and what types of agency were critical? The above agency concepts, therefore, seem to underplay an essential dimension of what role and the forms of agency are crucial at “the specific moments at which tourism economic paths emerge or are forced to shift direction. While the TCA recognises extra-regional actors and opportunity spaces, it emphasises agent- and region-specific opportunities. It, however, calls for an exploration of agentic processes and their embeddedness in multi-scalar networks and institutional contexts, which are behind shaping regional growth paths. Therefore, building on this call, we emphasise the multi-scalarity of one of its components - institutional

entrepreneurship and opportunity spaces. As Käsbohrer et al. (2024, p. 18) have also argued, opportunity spaces can be stratified by a multi-scalar institutional architecture...for agency”, meaning opportunity spaces are framed or shaped within regional, national, and even international levels. Lastly, our paper integrates the TCA and triggering events for a more context-relevant framework to analyse the role of agency in tourism paths.

4.2.4 Multiscalar Institutional Entrepreneurship

Multiscalar institutional change has recently received increased attention in agency studies (Boschma, 2017; Hassink et al., 2019; Benner, 2022), particularly in how institutional entrepreneurs at different scales impact path-creation processes. We follow the conceptualisation of institutional entrepreneurship explained by Grillitsch and Sotarauta (2020). This paper focuses on the interplay between national and regional actors and the impact of these actions on path creation (Dawley et al., 2015). This focus is crucial because a multiscalar approach can demonstrate how agents seize opportunities for institutional change at various scales, as change at one scale can trigger change at other scales (Grillitsch & Rekers, 2016). Our entry point is that in constrained contexts, like Southern Africa, the resourcefulness of institutional actors at the regional level may be hampered by the same institutions or postcolonial structures they seek to change, a concept known as the paradox of embedded agency (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). For example, land is an essential factor in the tourism business. In settler colonies, particularly in Botswana, Namibia, and Zimbabwe, unresolved land issues could mean that vast amounts of land remain in the hands of a few privileged white players (Moyo, 2005). Additionally, actors, primarily foreign and white (remnants of colonialism), may not share the same vision for change, leading to a lock-in. Such a scenario demands nation-state-level action to dismantle existing barriers, redistribute resources, and foster a more inclusive and dynamic post-colonial environment, ultimately shaping transformative development paths.

Acemoglu and Robinson (2010) emphasised that African countries inherited a complex, path-dependent set of institutions at independence, profoundly shaping their economic growth trajectory. However, the potential for creating new opportunities hinged on the agency of both local and national-state actors. The nation-state is, therefore, seen as a vital agent for path creation in such contexts. While the literature on the state of path creation exists (for example, Tripp et al., 2018; Steen, 2018), the role of the nation-state has not been extensively discussed,

particularly its capacity to seize critical junctures/ moments to promote paths. Dawley et al. (2015) have observed that the national policy agenda has mainly remained implicit in path creation studies. These studies view path creation primarily as a regional and territorialised process, often underestimating the role of extra-regional actors.

4.2.5 Triggering events

We combine literature on triggering events as moments that can shift the trajectory of a path by opening opportunity spaces with agency-centric conceptualisations of path creation. These decisive and powerful triggering events can induce the emergence of single or multiple growth paths (Chavez et al., 2023, p.5). While not a novel concept in evolutionary economic geography (EEG), much of the research on triggering events in tourism focuses on crises, natural disasters, terrorist attacks, and global economic crises. In tourism, triggers are acknowledged as influential elements with the potential to redirect destinations toward new paths (Chavez et al., 2023; Hall, 2010). Other scholars have examined these 'crisis-related events' negative and positive spillover effects on tourism paths (Ritchie et al., 2013; Sanz-Ibáñez et al., 2016). However, existing literature primarily focuses on analysing these significant external shocks or unexpected events as catalysts for change, leaving a gap in understanding moments that go beyond the natural environment and broad economic trends, particularly those related to social and cultural factors (Sanz-Ibáñez et al., 2016). The triggering events we refer to here encompass more than just isolated events; they can arise from planned initiatives, either spontaneously or driven by processes that originate from the top-down or the bottom-up. These initiatives can be regulatory or resource-based, stemming from endogenous or exogenous sources (Sanz-Ibáñez et al., 2016). Of course, the intensity of triggers differs, so local context must be considered in the analysis as some triggers are path-creating, while others are path-plastic or more incremental (Strambach, 2010).

We focus on these political and intentional policy changes that trigger new path creation (Sanz-Ibáñez et al., 2016; Chavez et al., 2023). The historical colonisation process has profoundly impacted Southern Africa's political, social, and economic structures that govern tourism. Recognising this influence is crucial, as it significantly shapes the landscape of regional industrial restructuring. The end of the colonial era is viewed as a significant trigger, creating new opportunity spaces for agents to exercise their agency and initiate transformative paths (Gill & Williams, 2014). This recognition underscores the external influence of historical and

political events in shaping the conditions for agency and path creation. The transition from colonial to post-colonial eras marked a critical juncture (Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007), prompting responsive actions from various actors at different scales. Baekkelund (2021) defines a critical juncture as a relatively short period during which there is a significantly heightened probability that agent choices will impact the outcome of interest (Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007, p. 348). Critical junctures not only imply the existence of an opportunity space but also events necessitating change, reflecting the complex interplay between historical legacies, structural shifts, and actors' agency in shaping the developmental trajectories of post-colonial states.

The diagram below (Fig. 2) illustrates our conceptual framework, explaining the evolution of tourism paths through the path-triggering role of decolonisation. The end of colonialism created a critical juncture in which a nation-state-level institutional entrepreneurship was vital to overcoming the barriers established by colonial history. Black actors face significant barriers and constraints, such as high entry costs and limited access to land, finance, and international markets. Racial and colonial cliques often dominated these markets. Christie et al. (2013) also discuss these challenges, noting that about 70 per cent of tourism businesses are controlled by foreign and international actors due to these structural obstacles. Such challenges require a responsive state to the demands of regional actors to foster the emergence of viable and equitable paths.

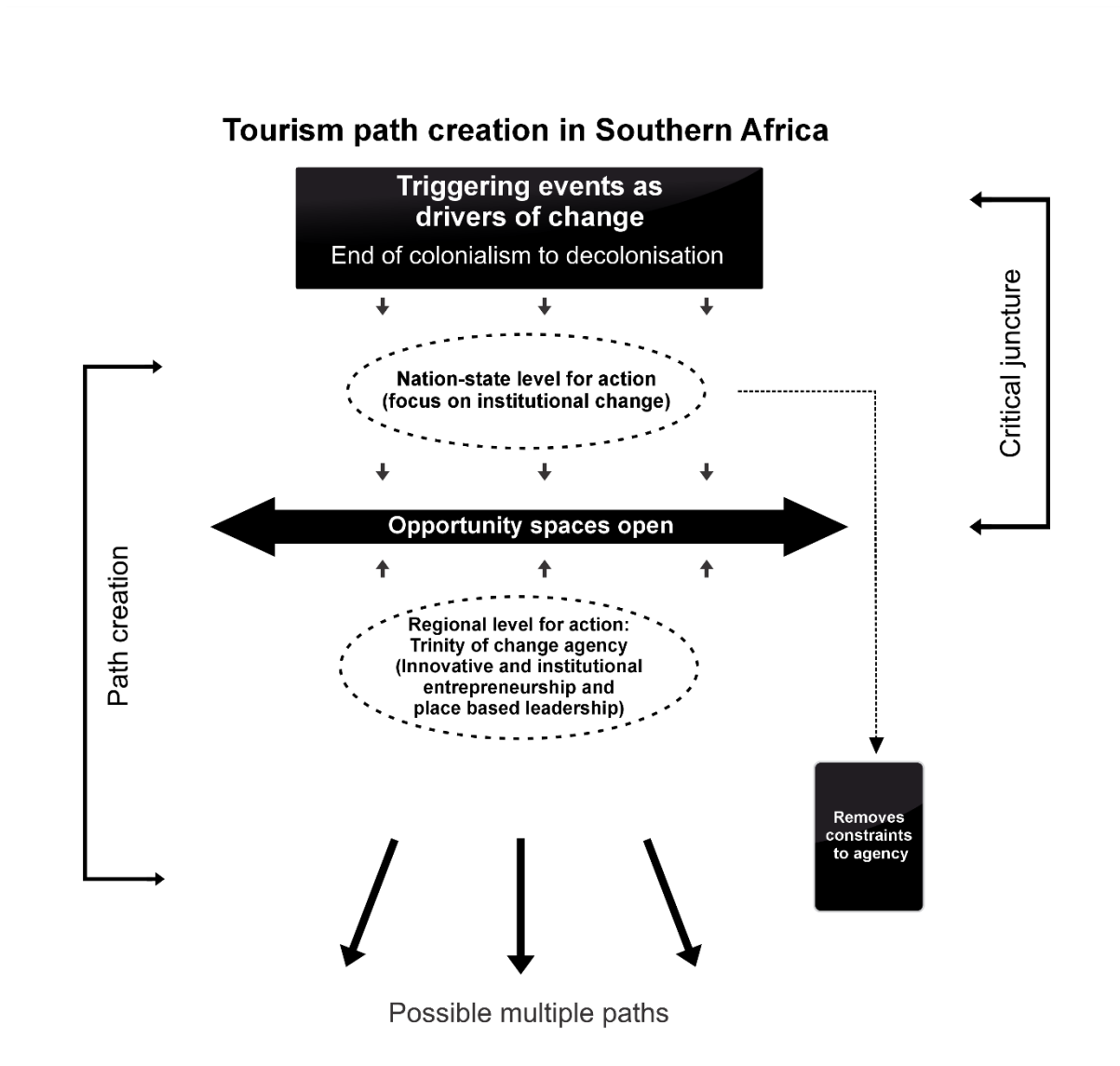


Figure 2: Conceptual Framework for tourism path creation in Southern Africa

4.3 Methodology and Data Collection

Our methodology is informed by the work of Grillitsch et al. (2019), which examines the interplay between structure and agency as theoretical concepts. Given this context, we adopt a qualitative path-tracing methodology. Path tracing "aims to identify and explain the causal mechanisms connecting the events with agency and structures" (Sotarauta & Grillitsch, 2022, p. 3). Our preliminary research revealed that a constricted path ultimately grew or emerged at the point of independence in all three case studies. Accordingly, we decided to start our path tracing from the point of independence in each region. We focused on identifying the key actors

and phases, including the critical junctures, to understand the path-creation process (Bennet & Checkel, 2017). Based on our conversations with key players, the distinct phases, the roles played by each player, and the impact of these roles became clear.

Operationalising TCA and Multi-scalar Institutional Entrepreneurship

Given that the concepts discussed above are deep theoretical constructs, we needed to operationalise and contextualise the three forms of agency in the TCA and the Multi-scalar Institutional Entrepreneurship agency within the specific context of our study in Southern Africa. The third column displays how we measure (by identifying the actions and activities) and detect each form of agency.

Table 4: Operationalising TCA and defining actions for multi-scalar Institutional Entrepreneurship

Agency	Identifying components	Dimensions for Measurement
Innovative entrepreneurship	Introduces groundbreaking products and activities, such as bungee jumping, helicopter tours, niche culinary experiences, or inventive marketing strategies, which may be new in the region These innovations, being novel and requiring investment, carry inherent risks due to their deviation from the region's normative practices.	Based on (Shane, 2003; De Jong & Hartog, 2008) • Opportunity Exploration (Willingness to change) • Idea generation (new tourism activities) • Application and Outcomes (e.g. Number of new activities, new ways of doing things)
Institutional entrepreneurship	These are efforts by individuals or organisations to transform existing endogenous or regional institutions or create new ones, such as the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority, Taxation, registration procedures, etc.	Based on Hoogstraaten, Koen, & Wouter (2020) • The criteria are the same as Innovative entrepreneurship above, • They break with existing expectations, norms and regulations

	Lobbying for the creation of regulatory bodies and structures, e.g. Tourism Councils enhance access to finance and improve destination appeal,	• (outcomes) Change of existing formal and informal institutions
Place-based leaders	Prioritise the collective good, such as regional strategy and tourism identity, mainly destination branding Central to their efforts is tackling major growth barriers, such as land, market access and supporting marginalised groups within the region. Focus on fostering coordination and unity for common progress while attempting to diligently address sensitive issues like racial justice at the regional level. Coordinating advocacy efforts and lobbying at the nation-state level to tackle structural challenges impeding change	Adapted from leadership studies (Gibney et al., 2009; Sotarauta et al., 202 • Number of local collaborations • Level of success in destination branding • Understanding of and identification/ action on the strategic vision of the place • Focus on the entrepreneurial discovery process (capabilities, knowledge, strengths, knowledge base) • Number of Multi-scale actions between the region and the nation-state
Multi-scalar Institutional Entrepreneurship	National government initiatives for reshaping the regional innovation landscape, especially in addressing challenges that surpass local actors' capabilities. These efforts include enacting strategic policies and allocating specific budgets for institutional reforms.	• Types and number of nation-state policies directed at removing constraints • What actions are aimed at improving the capacity of actors (access to finance, land, etc)

	Acknowledging and actively overcoming historical limitations impeding actors' agency.	• Actions reforming and introducing new institutions
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Case Context and Case Selection

We scrutinised three case studies in SA, a region with a history of shared settler colonialism. The cases fall within the Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area (KAZA). Established in 2011, KAZA is the world's largest land-based conservation territory, spanning 200,387 square miles across five countries and boasting three UNESCO World Heritage sites, 36 national parks, and a rich biodiversity, including over 250,000 elephants and numerous plant and bird species. The Okavango Delta, the largest inland delta globally, adds to KAZA's allure, positioning it as a highly coveted safari destination with immense potential for the tourism industry.

Sampling and Data Collection, and Analysis

Our methodology involved constructing a timeline of events and identifying the roles of different actors in these events. We conducted desktop research, collecting documents like policy papers, newspaper articles, company reports, strategy documents, and published journals. Additionally, we conducted preliminary interviews with key institutional actors such as mayors, regional council chairpersons, and leaders (CEOs) of tourism business associations and tourism ministries. These interviews helped us understand the regional context and identify critical junctures, events, opportunities, challenges, and actors' responses in each case. With a clear timeline and events, we then asked respondents how they reacted to each of these events and the outcomes of those actions. Our respondents had deep knowledge about these events and the impacts of their actions.

Our research benefited from the work of fellow researchers in the region who had extensive contacts in Namibia, as referenced in studies by Breul, Hulke, & Kalvelage (2021) and Kalvelage (2021). We formed a diverse group of key informants, including owners of tourist enterprises, CEOs, tour guides, research experts, banks, and regional strategy experts. Using the snowball technique, we mapped networks. We engaged vital actors, conducting 68 interviews and three focus group discussions from August 2022 to January 2023. Each

interview, lasting one and a half to two hours, followed a list of pre-agreed themes to ensure a comprehensive and focused discussion. The focus group discussions lasted, on average, two hours. At the end of each interview, we asked respondents to evaluate which type of agency was present in each phase.

Our data was organised into phases identified above, allowing us to capture contextual conditions and agents' actions. This approach helped determine specific actions towards particular events (or phases) and outcomes. We also asked regional experts to comment on these narratives from transcripts. With this qualitative method of analysis, we were able to develop a clear case study account based on raw data, archival data and transcripts.

4.3 Tourism Path Creation in Southern Africa: Empirical Case Studies

This section presents three cases demonstrating the evolution of three distinct paths. We illustrate below how these paths differ significantly among the three regions regarding unique attractions, the number of registered enterprises, and the average annual turnover.

Table 5: Overview of the Tourism Industry

Region	Number of registered enterprises	Unique Attractions / Activities	Average annual foreign visitor¹	Average annual turnover²
Zambezi	61	6	20 000	USD 10m
Chobe	459	12	350 000	USD 52m
Victoria Falls	250	30	500 000	USD 400m

Source: Based on the author's computations

Case 1: The Evolution of the Tourism Path in the Zambezi Region

The Zambezi region, comprising 14% of the KAZA and housing three national parks, has rich natural resources. Compared to the other two cases, Zambezi needs to catch up on key

¹ Numbers based on total region national parks visits obtained from the Department of National Park Parks Botswana and Namibia, and the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority

² Values based on calculations by Kalvelage, Revilla Diez, & Bollig (2022) show a dominance of hunting tourism receipts

indicators of success for the tourism industry (See Table 5 above), even though it is host to four major animal corridors and the Zambezi River, Africa's fourth-longest river. These features present remarkable opportunities for wildlife viewing, fishing, and boat cruises, offering great promise for tourism-based economic growth.

Phase 1 - Critical Juncture and Emergence: 1990-1996

The period from Namibia's independence in 1990 until 1996 marked a critical juncture, catalysing new tourism opportunities post-colonialism. A significant turning point occurred with the 1990 land conference, which focused on addressing disparities in land ownership, notably where a small white minority possessed a considerable amount of land in a country with a predominantly black population (Melber, 2019). This conference led to policy reforms recognising communal land rights, which facilitated the emergence of the tourism industry. However, as noted in our focus group discussions, many prime land "hot spots" for tourism were seized at independence due to first-mover advantages and are currently held under 20-40-year leases. Interviews revealed that many entrepreneurs were either former South African defence force generals or white South Africans who had previously travelled to the region as tourists. These individuals took advantage of the independence period and their access to finance to establish tourism companies.

The introduction of Community-Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) initiated the tourism path in the Zambezi region. Before this, local stakeholders and NGOs advocated for enhanced natural resource management rights. The policy led to increased animal populations, attracting trophy hunters. Due to ongoing military activities by the South African defence forces, the region had only four tourism establishments that emerged between 1990-96 (Breul et al., 2021). Institutional entrepreneurship, driven by NGOs like the Integrated Rural Development and Nature Conservation (IRDNC) and World Wildlife Fund (WWF), for example, advocating for supportive policy frameworks, played a vital role in the emergence of tourism activities. They designed and lobbied for the adoption of CBNRM policies. However, persistent structural constraints, including racial land ownership and unequal access to financial capital, limit innovative entrepreneurship, especially for black entrepreneurs. For example, despite these momentous changes, the tourism industry remains mainly in the hands of white Namibians. The figure below shows the path tracing and phases over time.

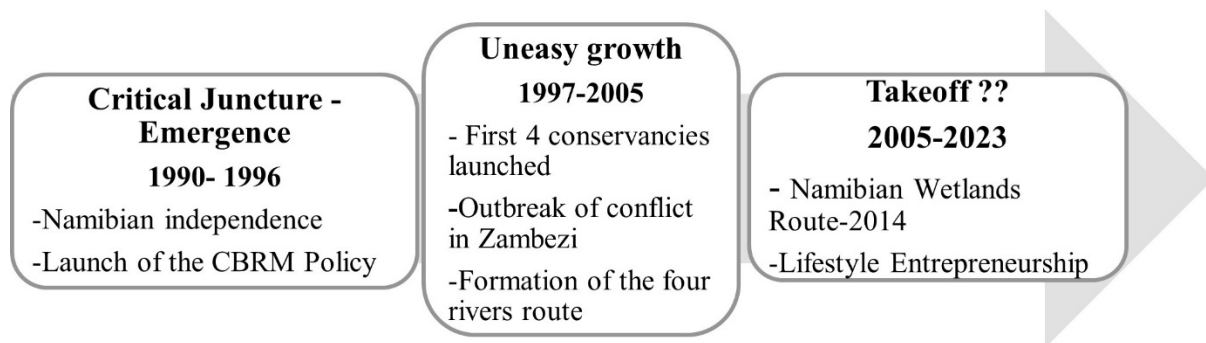


Figure 3: The Zambezi region tourism path

Phase II - Uneasy Growth: 1997-2005

The 'uneasy growth' phase in tourism presented a conundrum; it was fraught with challenges yet demonstrated significant potential for expansion. Within the Zambezi region, tourism establishments increased from just 4 in 1997 to 24 by 2005 (Suich et al., 2005). Predominantly, these were small-scale campsites with minimal Innovation, primarily catering to the lower-end market (backpackers, short-term travellers, and small groups). However, tourism operators noted that this burgeoning growth was abruptly disrupted by civil unrest in 1999, ignited by the secessionist movements within the Zambezi (Henning, 2009), which marred the region's tourism image. Reacting to this setback, tourism stakeholders rallied together and formed informal groups to market the region.

Consequently, the Four Rivers Route (*a membership-based organisation of tourism players*) was formed in 2004 and would be instrumental as a lobbying platform and institutional actor. This proactive initiative underscored the role of institutional entrepreneurship within this phase. Entrepreneurs owning, for example, Camp Kwando, Caprivi River Lodge, and Gondwana Collection capitalised on post-independence opportunities in Zambezi, collaborating with institutional entrepreneurs like the IRDNC and WWF. Gondwana Lodges, a newcomer, effectively used its resources to shape the tourism trajectory. Despite their success, concerns arose over the dominance of white, foreign-owned businesses (Suich et al., 2005). While innovative and institutional entrepreneurship was evident, its impact remained limited. The lack of place-based leadership highlighted a need for better industry coordination, begging for state intervention.

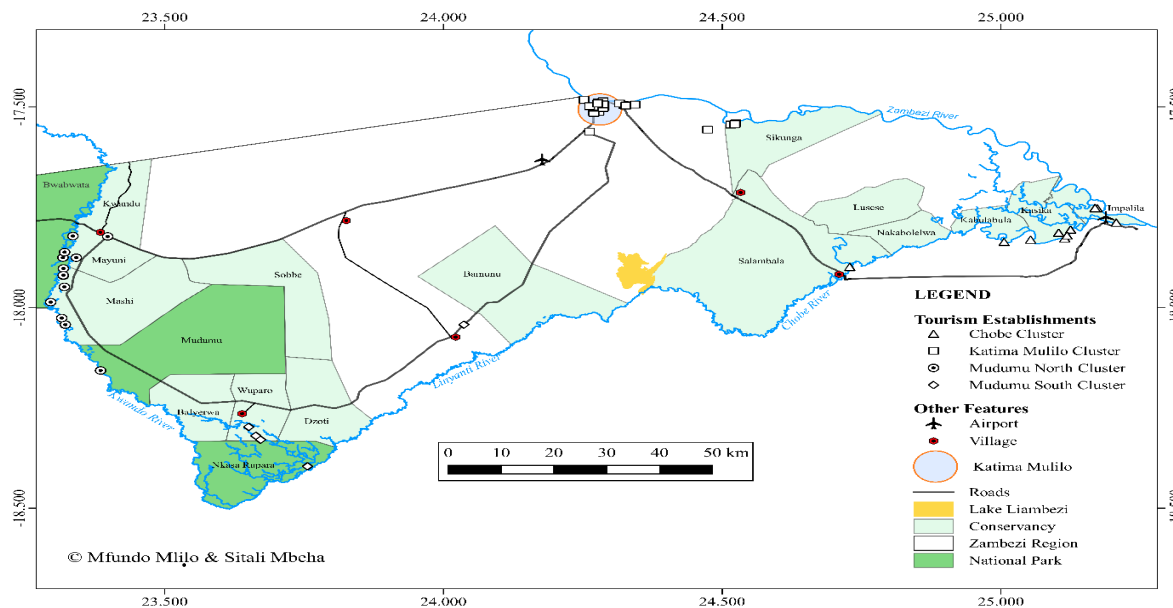


Figure 4: Zambezi region map showing locational patterns of tourism establishments- September 2022

Phase iii: Takeoff? – Lifestyle Entrepreneurship (2006-2023)

The region has experienced considerable growth in tourism, with the emergence of over 20 conservancies by 2006. A survey noted 47 enterprises in 2019, and by 2022, an increase to 61 enterprises (Kalvelage et al., 2022). However, this growth is more quantitative than qualitative. A review of a report from the Namibia Tourism Board showed that of the 61 businesses, 45 are managed by individuals over 50, often driven by personal pleasure or retirement rather than a transformative business vision. They enjoy customer interactions, favouring a smaller client base for a more personal connection. Their aim is not high sales or profits but a comfortable and satisfactory life (Dias & Azambuja, 2022). However, as one entrepreneur noted, "While our businesses are small, we consider ourselves pioneers, and we have brought significant employment and development to this community." Infrastructural investments were limited due to lease renewal uncertainties, resulting in the domination of temporary structures. The Namibia Wetlands Route, formerly the Four Rivers Route, formed in phase 2, owes its existence to institutional entrepreneurs, particularly the founder of Wild Waters Group. As a critical institutional entrepreneur, he champions the Zambezi Region's emergence as a tourism destination, aiming to align stakeholder perspectives and support best practices. However, his Zambezi initiatives lack coordination, highlighting the need for place-based leadership and a responsive nation-state. Our research highlighted the struggles of local black entrepreneurs, mainly tied to capital access, location disadvantages, and limited beneficial networks. The

Namibian government's top-down approaches are not responsive to the specific industry needs of local actors. The lack of interplay between regional and nation-state actors impedes growth.

Case II: The Evolution of the Tourism Path in the Chobe Region

At least 70% of Chobe is protected areas, including national parks and forest reserves. According to the 2011 census, the region's population is around 23,000, relying on agriculture and tourism for economic prosperity. Chobe's main attraction is its diverse wildlife, including the Big Five (lion, leopard, elephant, rhinoceros, and buffalo). Chobe National Park, in particular, offers exceptional elephant sightings, which play a significant role in KAZA Tourism.

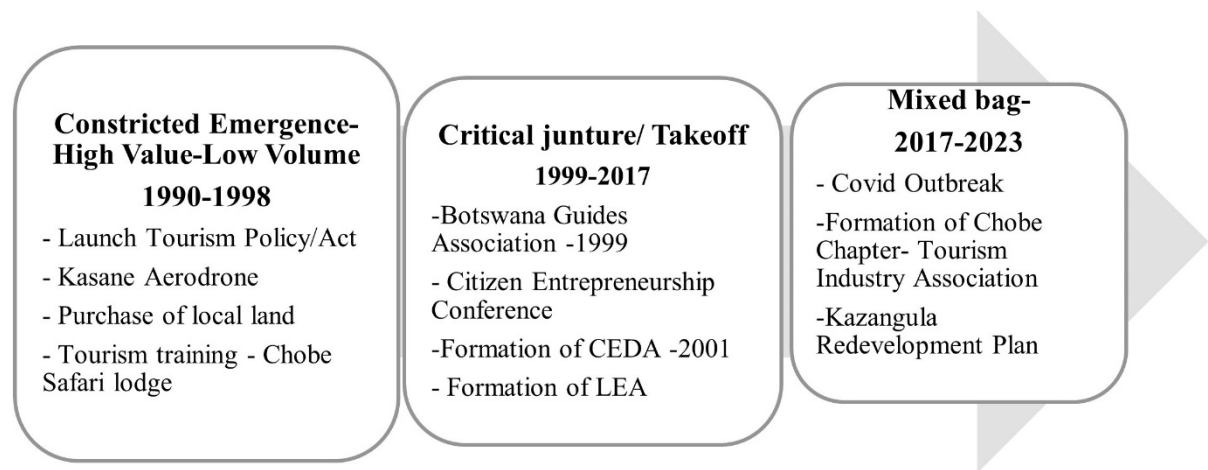


Figure 5: The Chobe Region tourism path

Phase 1: Constricted Emergence to High Value-Low Volume Tourism (1990-1998)

Colonised by Britain in 1885, Botswana gained independence in 1966, inheriting a complex colonial legacy. Chobe's tourism emergence coincided with independence, highlighted by founding the Chobe Game Reserve in 1960 and the Chobe Safari Hotel in 1961. However, the region did not reach its full potential until the late 1990s. Capoccia and Kelemen (2007) observe that relatively brief periods of momentous political, social, or economic upheaval with little institutional change are not critical junctures. Chobe's development at the end of colonialism faced setbacks due to military activities from the South African Defense Forces in the Caprivi Strip and the liberation conflict in Zimbabwe from the 1970s to the 1980s (Dale, 1978). Chobe district-initiated tourism development in 1990, aligning with the national policy to boost local involvement and private sector engagement. Initially trophy hunting-focused, the industry evolved into high-value, low-impact leisure tourism, led by key firms like Chobe Game Lodge,

Chobe Safari, and Kubu Lodge, supported by the Hospitality Association of Botswana. This marked the early phase of the tourism path, driven by innovative entrepreneurs and institutional entrepreneurship, but the path was focused on maintaining the status quo.

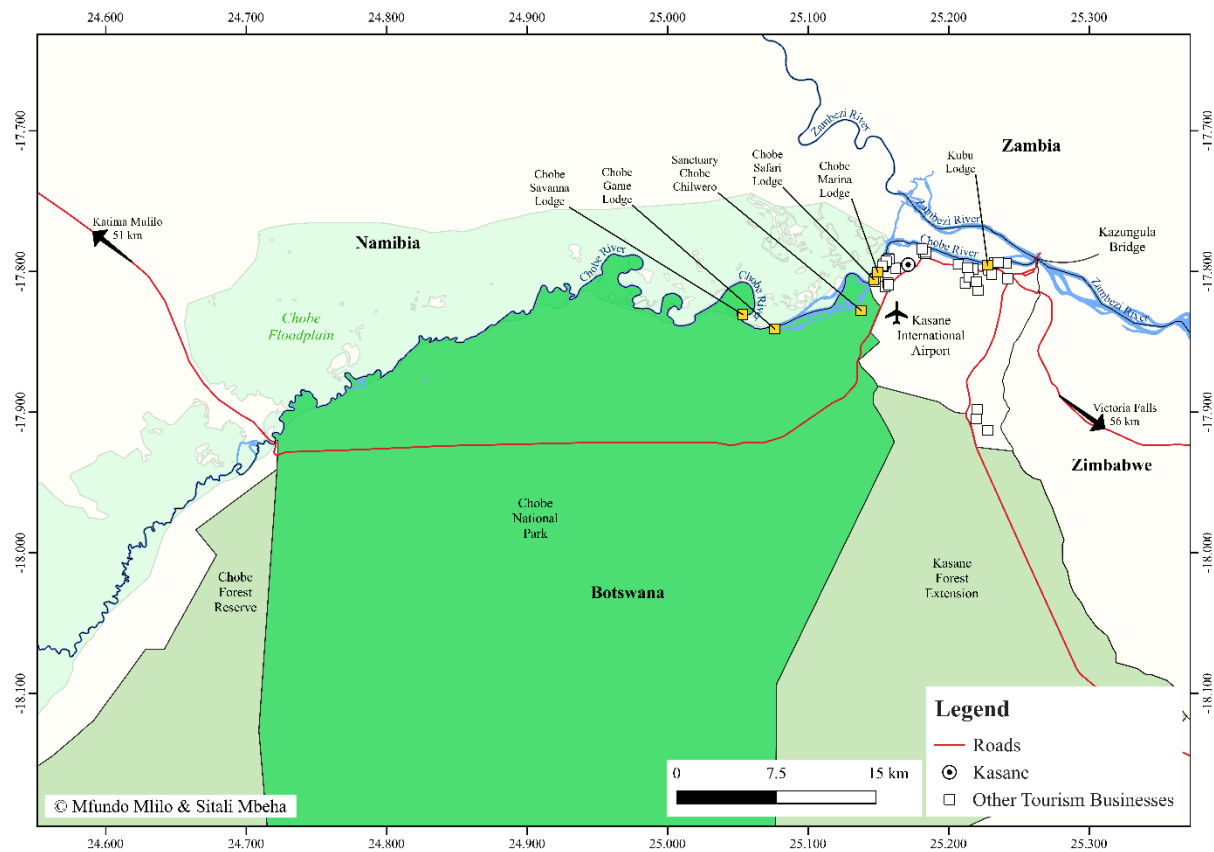


Figure 6: Chobe region map showing locational patterns of tourism establishments- September 2022

Phase II: Critical Juncture and Takeoff (1999-2017)

In the early stages of the path, local entrepreneurs faced barriers due to high entry costs and restricted access to prime tourist spots. The government's tourism policy, launched in 1990, proved financially prohibitive, requiring deep connections with global travel agents and extensive documentation. By 1999, stakeholders lobbied against the policy's perceived failure, expressing frustration over foreign dominance. Our research uncovered a robust national-scale institutional response to public debates and lobbying on government policy and tourism struggles. The Daily News, in 1999, highlighted economic participation with stories like "All Must Participate in the Economy" and "BDP Government Supports Citizen Economic Empowerment." Place-based leader Bahiti Temane and the Botswana Guides Association advocated for small operators' unity, leading to the transformative Citizen Entrepreneurship

Conference in July 1999. This event, demanded by local place-based leaders, prompted the government to reassess its Financial Assistance Policy (FAP), established in 1982, resulting in the formation of the Citizen Entrepreneurial Development Agency (CEDA) (Gergis, 1999).

Our discussion with CEDA officials revealed that it began to offer substantial financial support (up to BWP 50 million, approximately 3.7 million Euros per project), has supported over 747 projects across various sectors, including 57 in Chobe's tourism sector—23 hotels, 20 safari operations, and 14 restaurants, with 24 as startups. The Ministry of Youth has also indicated in an interview that it has funded 115 projects valued at BWP 11.5 million (approximately 800,000 Euros) since 2009, including 14 in tourism. Responding to industry needs, the government established the Local Enterprise Authority (LEA) through the Small Business Act 2004, geared towards agent capacities. Initiatives like upgrading Kasane Airport and policy reforms from 1999 to 2005 marked a critical juncture, leading to the industry's emergence and takeoff by 2017. In this phase, we can see how place-based leaders identified the national level as a scale for lobbying and how the state responded through institutional reforms to seize the moment for change.

Phase III: A Mixed Bag (2017-2023)

In an interview, the Ministry of Tourism in Botswana reported that by 2017, it had registered 479 tourism operators in the Chobe region, including 95 lodges and hotels. This remarkable growth is evident compared to three hotels in 1990 and 24 in 2004 (Suich et al., 2005). However, the COVID-19 pandemic that emerged in 2019 profoundly impacted the tourism path. A review of reports from Chobe National Park shows that the number of tourist arrivals plummeted from 409,997 to fewer than 100,000 in 2021. Botswana implemented strict and prolonged COVID-19 prevention measures, causing a significant delay in reopening the region to international travellers. In response to post-COVID-19 challenges, Chobe's tourism operators established the Tourism Industry Chobe Chapter, collaborating with the government on recovery strategies. Concurrently, the Kasane-Kazangula redevelopment plan (a state-initiated plan) to transform Kasane and Kazangula (two small towns in Chobe) into a tourism hub, which involved relocating government offices to free land on the riverside, a key tourist spot. This plan, however, sparked debates: large businesses voiced concerns about environmental impact and over-tourism, while smaller, local operators saw expansion opportunities. These views about the future underscore the vital need for place-based leadership to reconcile diverse perspectives within the sector.

Case III: The Evolution of the Tourism Path in the Victoria Falls Region

Victoria Falls is arguably the premier tourist destination in the KAZA. Home to one of the Seven Natural Wonders of the World and a UNESCO World Heritage site, the Victoria Falls Rainforest is the region's most visited and popular tourist attraction. The region is blessed with two national parks, the Mosi-oa-Tunya and Zambezi National Parks, which boast a wide array of species, including the Big Five.

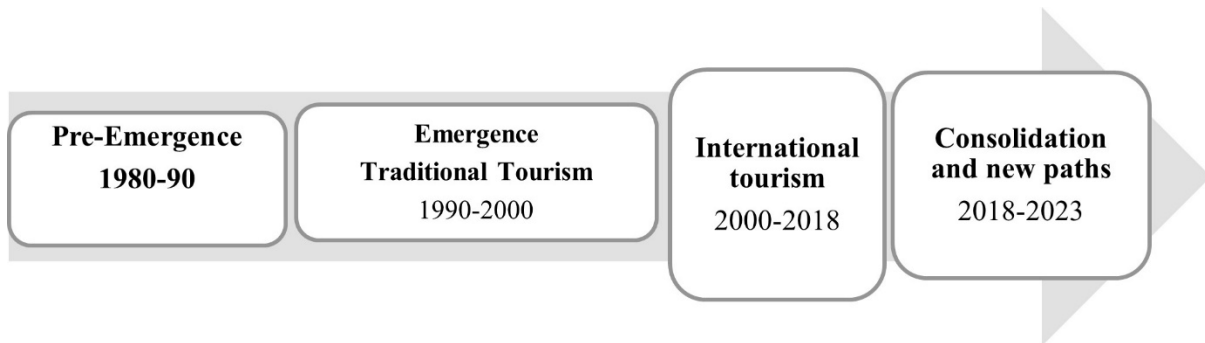


Figure 7: The Victoria Falls tourism path

Phase I: Pre-emergence – and Critical juncture: 1980-1990

The tourism industry in Victoria Falls has a long history dating back to the “Discovery” of Victoria Falls by David Livingstone, a British Missionary in the late 18th century. By early 1920, over 5,000 annual tourists visited Victoria Falls by train from Cape Town, South Africa (Arrington-Sirois, 2017). However, this exclusive and largely foreign-driven tourism remained constrained until the early 80s. The critical juncture for the tourism path was thus in 1980 with the independence of Zimbabwe and the dawn of a new era that opened new opportunities and increased interest in Zimbabwe and Victoria Falls in particular. In this way, the end of colonialism and the attendant reforms served as triggering factors. As Munjaidi (2019, p. 149) observes, "The tourism industry quickly responded to government efforts. From a low national annual tourist arrival count of 75,000 in 1979, visitor numbers more than tripled to 240,000 in 1980. By 1981, tourist arrivals increased to 375,000 and reached 400,000 in 1982. The Victoria Falls contributed a significant portion to these figures." Our Focus Group discussions noted that the Zimbabwean government introduced a dedicated Ministry for Tourism in 1980, which took over the registration and inspection of tourism establishments to open up the sector to many players. The National Railways Association, a colonial institution now government-owned, leased large tracts of land to new players. The ministry also formed the Zimbabwe Tourism Board, with a regional office in Victoria Falls, highlighting the priority given to this

region. Additionally, the government employed "tourism attachés," civil servants stationed in major source markets such as the USA and Britain, demonstrating higher-scale institutional entrepreneurship to promote the tourism path.

Since 1980, Victoria Falls has become a prime destination for adventure tourism, offering activities like white-water rafting, skydiving, and mountain climbing (Rogerson, 2004). Key informants point out that in this transformation, significant players were Wild Horizons (established in 1981) and Shearwater (established in 1982), which introduced innovative activities such as bungee jumping and canoeing, which revolutionised tourism with foreign arrivals rising to 400,000. Hotels in Victoria Falls, such as the Victoria Falls Hotel and the newly built Elephant Hills and Kingdom Hotel, customised their services to complement these adventure activities, creating a network that spurred industry growth.

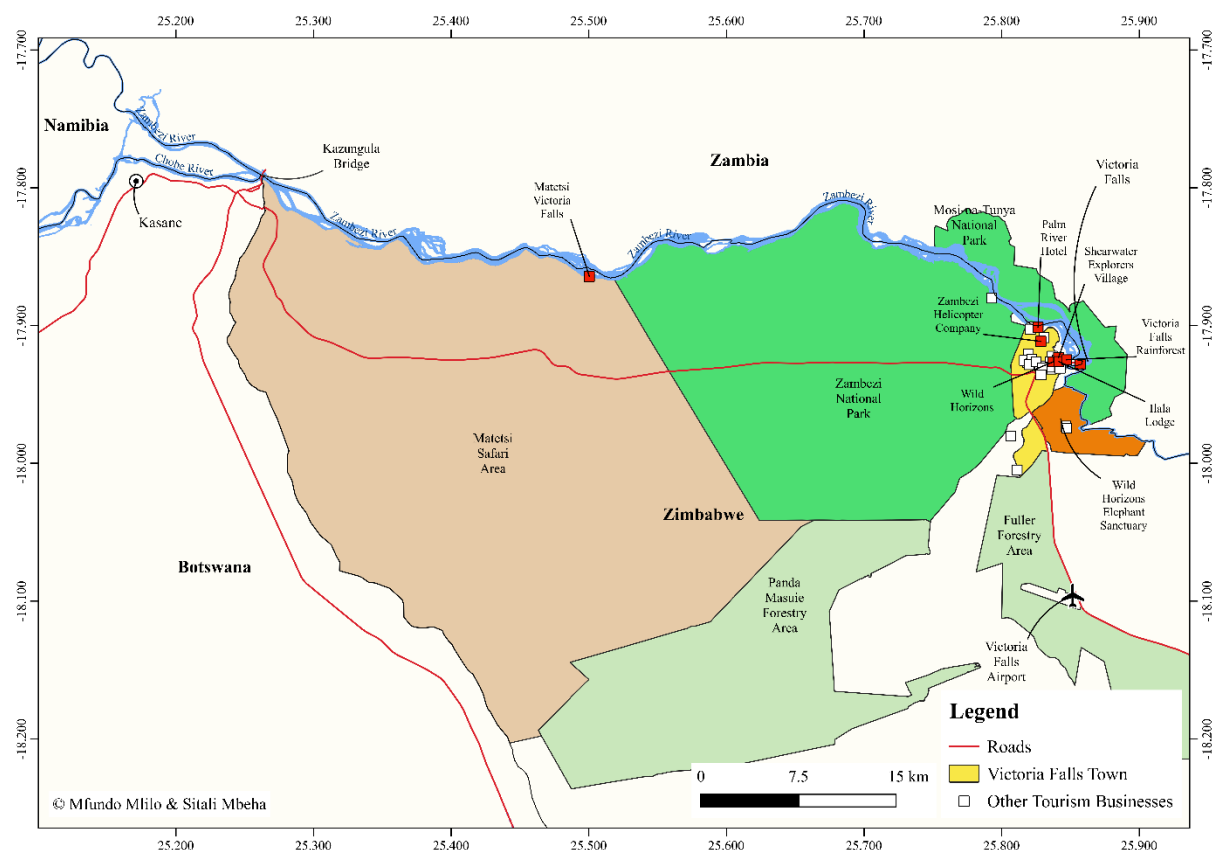


Figure 8: Victoria Falls map showing locational patterns of tourism establishments-
September 2022

Phase II: Emergence of Traditional Tourism - 1990-2000

The interplay of multiple forms of agency in the first phase from 1980 to 1990 saw the tourism industry in Victoria Falls grow, primarily driven by domestic tourism. During this period,

Shearwater introduced a helicopter service providing aerial views of the Falls, a unique offering that remained unchallenged for the following 15 years. A network of 3-star hotels, such as Ilala Lodges, and entertainment venues, including seven casinos and numerous nightclubs, emerged to cater to the growing domestic and regional travel market. This period of entrepreneurship was vital to fostering the growth of the domestic market and driving the emergence of new tourist facilities in Victoria Falls. However, by the end of 1999, political turmoil, notably farm invasions and election-related violence, caused a significant drop in the steadily growing number of international tourists.

Phase III: International Tourism 2000-2018

This phase saw significant developments driven by place-based leadership and institutional and innovative entrepreneurship. Responding to declining tourism due to political issues, place-based leadership, and innovative entrepreneurship led to strategic developments in Victoria Falls. Companies like Shear Water, Africa Travel and Wild Horizons diversified their offerings and focused on aggressive marketing, resulting in an appealing and varied product portfolio of over 50 activities. An employee council ensured industry stability by setting standard remuneration rates. Local tourism bodies like the Tourism Business Council and Hospitality Association of Zimbabwe persuaded the government to create a separate stock exchange traded in US dollars, encouraging international investments. In 2017, the government declared Victoria Falls a special economic zone for tourism and finance, leading to institutional reforms and boosting the industry. By 2020, Victoria Falls contributed over 30% to the country's tourism industry, which exceeded a billion dollars. Tourist arrivals peaked at over one million in 2019. To improve the tourist experience, a 'tourism police' force was established by the national government in partnership with local operators. The success was due to cooperation between local actors and international firms like Thomson's in the USA, the collaboration between Wild Horizons and Tourvest of South Africa, and the establishment of marketing offices in the USA, Germany and other markets. This effectively underlined the decisive role of the state.

Phase IV: Consolidation and New Directions

By March 2023, Victoria Falls had over 250 tourism operators, a sign of its growth path. Airport refurbishments led to a 40% increase in international arrivals (90,162 in 2016 to 126,245 in 2019) (Zimbabwe Tourism Authority, 2020). Despite setbacks from COVID-19, collaborations between industry and government fostered a national tourism recovery plan. The

focus briefly shifted to domestic tourism for loss recovery, and the medical tourism sector began thriving, with facilities like Victoria Falls Safari Lodges offering specialised services. Efforts to attract international remote workers through digital visa campaigns and ambitions to become an investment hub like Dubai are underway. Environmental sustainability is prioritised and led by projects like Pristine Victoria Falls and key players like Wild Horizons and Shearwater. Its established players earn upwards of USD 50m, much of which is mobilised from international tourism.

4.4 Comparison of Cases: Key Lessons and Observations

The three case studies offer a unique perspective on the changing role of agency in the evolution of tourist paths in Southern Africa, where many states share a history of settler colonialism. This colonial context is integral as an introduction to the discussion. Colonialism, which lasted over 100 years in Africa, was justified by colonisers on the premise that the "specific backwardness of the peoples subject to colonial dominance made it necessary to rule them not according to the principles of 'constitutional government' prevailing in Europe but according to principles of 'the patrimonial State existing before' it" (Mezzadra, 2020). This created a society based on exclusion, compelling people into waged labor and establishing a dichotomy between citizens and subjects. Consequently, much of the literature on African entrepreneurship highlights how colonialism constrained entrepreneurial activities and influenced their post-colonial emergence (Akoorie et al., 2020). The colonial state was also geared towards extraction, supporting only a section of the population (Young, 2019).

Consequently, ending such a system was momentous and triggered a critical juncture, opening opportunities for actors to exercise their agency. However, as Piša (2023, p. 493) notes, merely having a window of opportunity is not enough; the ability to seize these opportunities depends on the quantity and quality of human and social capital of change agents. In Chobe and Zambezi, while decolonisation marked a crucial turning point, the tourism sector took time to flourish, while in Victoria Falls, there was sudden growth. Chobe and Zambezi faced challenges due to a shortage of capable local actors. Developing the capacity of local agents to recognise and exploit specific local characteristics and opportunities has taken time, delaying the growth of tourism paths. Much of the literature on agency assumes the existence of capable agents in regional development, which was not always the case in most post-colonial African states. Only foreign and risk-taking "white players" often continued from colonial times.

Consequently, in these circumstances, various forms of agency must evolve to make an impact. This explains why nation-state scale institutional entrepreneurship was crucial, as the new governments sought to leverage the new dispensation through state capitalism. State capitalism became the dominant form of governance, characterised by the state's concentration of political power and the state sector's predominance in the economy (Turok, 1979). However, this top-down approach (particularly in the first phases) was not always the best solution because, in certain instances, it created market failures.

Therefore, our case study analysis indicates that despite the importance of the nation-state through its agency, the decisive factor is not a specific form of agency but the interplay between nation-level actors and regional actors. Institutional and Place-based leaders advocate for reforms, and the state responds by investing in transformation. In Chobe and Zambezi, the opportunities presented by decolonisation were not effectively utilised, and the window of opportunity lapsed. For Chobe, the Citizen Conference of 1999 became a second critical juncture. The government allocated large tracts of land and financial packages through low-cost loans and grants, the state-driven Kasane redevelopment plan, and market access training programs, which have increased the quality and quantity of agents, especially black actors. This suggests that tourism path creation can be viewed as a series of successive critical junctures where the interplay of agency is crucial. As long as the continuities of the past remain unaddressed, the nation-state remains an indispensable actor in the tourism path emergence.

As for Victoria Falls, the nation-state seized the moment of independence, instituting significant institutional changes in response to local actors. They identified tourism as a strategic industry, and over time, the interplay between nation-state and regional actors in declaring Victoria Falls a special economic zone, implementing legislation for a unique stock exchange, and establishing a tourism police unit has all contributed to making Victoria Falls a thriving destination. In contrast, Namibia introduced the CBNRM policy at its independence, but its efforts have not addressed past structural deficiencies primarily related to land ownership. Its tourism initiatives have neglected the Zambezi region. Consequently, the three forms of agency in the TCA are missing at the local level to facilitate path emergence and growth. The operational environment has not sufficiently supported the emergence of capable and high-quality actors. Our analysis shows that the state in Namibia is not responsive enough to facilitate the interplay that supports path emergence.

In Chobe and Victoria Falls, we observe the importance of place-based leadership, particularly in advocating for greater nation-state involvement. During times of change or critical junctures, place-based leadership is vital for reconciling the interests of various actors. As Chobe balances mass tourism with environmental concerns and Victoria Falls debates its value chain's future trajectory, the role of place-based leaders becomes increasingly important. Moreover, we can see the limits to tourism path growth, especially concerning environmental sustainability. The challenges facing future tourism trajectories in Chobe and Victoria Falls highlight the limits to growth. While the nation-state's role is decisive, it cannot act alone and often responds to calls from place-based and institutional actors. This finding supports the TCA's conceptualisation that regional change is a multi-actor effort and that various forms of agency presuppose each other. It also underscores the state's responsiveness, which is crucial for enabling place-based and institutional actors to construct regional advantages in tourism paths.

The Chobe and Victoria Falls case studies provide a deeper understanding of the multi-scalarity of institutional entrepreneurship and opportunity spaces. As the nation-state and local actors interact, they create opportunities for local and international actors. This is especially important for tourism paths in Africa, which often rely on international resources for growth. As we observe in Victoria Falls and Chobe, the role of international players is significant in tourism path creation. These external entities bring specialised knowledge, financial resources, and access to broader markets. However, input from international players creates a scenario where the tourism paths in these regions are considerably reliant on external forces (Christie et al., 2013). This observation underscores the delicate balance and interdependence between local and global dynamics in developing tourism industry paths in these areas.

4.5 Conclusions

Our research contributes to the ongoing economic geography debate on why some regions grow more (or less) than others despite having similar structural preconditions. We further contribute to the emerging literature on path creation in tourism studies. We adopt an agency perspective that builds on the trinity of change agency concept by emphasising the multi-scalarity of one of its components, institutional entrepreneurship and triggering events to understand the decisive role and forms of agency crucial for the emergence and evolution of tourist paths in Southern Africa.

We draw two key conceptual conclusions: Firstly, our paper confirms the applicability of the TCA in Southern Africa and, more importantly, addresses the prevailing literature's bias

towards manufacturing industries by emphasising service-based industries. We propose a framework explaining how the interplay of various forms of agency drives the evolution of tourism paths during critical junctures. This framework sharpens the TCA's explanatory power for path-creation processes in structurally weak and post-colonial contexts in Southern Africa, showing how the end of colonialism, as a significant triggering event, created a critical juncture that enabled the construction of opportunity spaces and the exercise of agency. This advances the literature on the role of significant events or critical moments as causal factors in path emergence. Our evidence, drawn from case studies, specifically pertains to the tourism industry in this region. While we do not claim that our findings can be generalised to other industries and contexts, we believe the conceptual framework can explain tourism path emergence in post-colonial contexts.

Secondly, we demonstrate that the nation-state is vital in driving tourism paths through institutional entrepreneurship agency. Due to the constraining impact of colonial history and its resulting institutions, nation-state-level institutional entrepreneurship is crucial for tourist path emergence and evolution. The state plays a decisive role in enhancing the capacity of actors to leverage their agency. This is crucial because the quality and quantity of actors needed for transformation may be absent at the regional level. This process also depends on place-based and institutional actors advocating for the state's intervention at the local level. Therefore, the interplay between the state and local actors during times of change is crucial for path emergence in SA. Furthermore, this allows us to empirically demonstrate that institutional change and opportunity spaces are not limited to a single scale but occur within a web of multiscale dynamics, including regional, national, and supranational levels, responding to Grillitsch and Sotarauta's (2020) call for such studies (Käsbohrer et al., 2024).

A thriving tourism path has emerged in Victoria Falls and Chobe but remains heavily dependent on international markets and actors, bringing questions about developmental outcomes. Further research is needed to comprehensively understand how to sustain and enhance this trajectory. Although path tracing typically focuses on historical analysis (Sotarauta & Grillitsch, 2022), we used actors' narratives to hypothesise about future projects along the timeline of events. This approach highlights the dynamic nature of the TCA framework and underscores the ongoing need for various forms of agency to navigate emerging critical junctures.

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5. Coloniality of Power and the Imaginaries of Tourism in Victoria Falls

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Abstract

Victoria Falls, a majestic waterfall designated as a World Heritage site in Zimbabwe, is one of Africa's well-sought-after tourist destinations. The thriving tourism industry in Victoria Falls emerged from the early days of colonialism in 1900 to occupy an essential position within the British colonial empire and thus played a central role in travel itineraries in Southern Africa. However, alongside its emergent success, previously envisioned within European colonial imagery of leisure and supremacy, participation in the present tourism value chain and value capture is uneven and skewed towards foreign and white-own tourism businesses. These patterns of exclusion potentially mirror the racial structural inequalities imposed by colonialism, which ended in 1980. In this paper, we contribute to scholarship on tourism global value chains (GVCs) by analysing the role and impact of history /colonial past on the current nature of the tourism value chain in Victoria Falls. In this approach, we adopt the concept of Coloniality of power to illuminate past continuities and explain the uneven participation and value capture among actors. More fundamentally, we provide a brief reflection on how tourism GVCs can be extricated from colonial and racial legacies.

Keywords: Global value chains, evolutionary economic geography, coloniality

5.1 Introduction

Over the last few years, a series of studies have emerged that have activated critical dialogues about the nature of power, discourses and representations in the tourism industry (see, for example, Bianchi, 2009; Ateljevic et al., 2007a; Mura & Wijesinghe, 2023). These studies coincide with the resurgence of the concept of Coloniality of power (Hereafter, Coloniality) as a liberatory discourse by previously colonised people in search of a new world order (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015; Mercer et al., 2003). In this paper, we combine these two emerging discourses: We engage with critical tourism geographies through an empirical study that unpacks racialised inequalities in participation and value capture within the tourism value chain in Victoria Falls,

³ See <https://www.sciencedirect.com/journal/geoforum/about/awards/2024-geoforum-best-student-paper-award>

Zimbabwe, using the GVC approach. Secondly, we deploy Coloniality to illuminate past continuities within the current tourism industry in Victoria Falls. We aim to enquire about possible connections between structural inequalities imposed by colonialism on present-day tourism value chains and conclude with a brief reflection on a decolonial approach to inclusive tourism geographies.

This approach marks a departure from conventional GVC research, which tends to overlook the significance of service sectors such as tourism and seldom incorporates the concept of coloniality. Many existing narratives offer predominantly positive views of GVCs (Crescenzi & Harman, 2022), often neglecting to inquire into the intricate dynamics of structural and institutional processes that either foster or impede fair participation and value distribution. These institutional and structural processes are often viewed as products of local dynamics rather than outcomes of global racialised systems of governance and resource control (Christian, 2019). While some research has begun to explore the darker aspects of economic geography and GVCs (e.g., Morales & Atienza, 2022; Hulke & Revilla Diez, 2020; Werner & Bair, 2019; Phelps et al., 2018), this body of literature remains primarily descriptive rather than explanatory (Boschma, 2022). GVC research addressing the issue of uneven development, which encompasses the selective accumulation of capital in specific locations and to some actors to the exclusion of others, has primarily been articulated through the "disarticulations" perspective (see, for example, Bair & Werner, 2011a; Werner & Bair, 2019, for a comprehensive review). We, therefore, advance this perspective and illustrate how disparities within the tourism GVCs have a historical lineage deeply rooted in colonialism.

Tourism has become an essential industry as many peripheral regions in SSA are increasingly looking towards it to support sustainable development (Nel, 2002; Christie et al., 2013). For example, tourism contributed seven per cent of Africa's GDP and about US\$169 billion to its economy in 2019 (Monnier, 2021). This growth was disrupted by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, but statistics from the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) indicate a resurgence. International tourism grew by 86% in the first quarter of 2023, while it grew by 85% in Africa, recovering 88% of international arrivals compared to the 2019 pre-pandemic (UNWTO, 2023). Victoria Falls is designated one of the world's seven natural wonders, making it a must-see tourist destination in SSA. The Zimbabwe government seeks to position the region as a top destination in SSA through its partnership with the World Bank and the 'We are Victoria Falls' campaign.⁴ Victoria Falls is the gateway to the Kavango Zambezi Trans-Frontier Park (KAZA), the world's second-largest nature and landscape conservation park, making it a strategic destination for tourism traffic within Southern Africa. In 2018, Victoria Falls' tourism revenue topped about 30 per cent of the US\$1.386 billion generated through tourism in Zimbabwe (Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA), 2018). These high figures show that the tourism industry is growing and resilient and can significantly contribute to economic growth; therefore, its distributional effects must be investigated.

⁴ See <https://wearevictoriafalls.com/>

However, despite this potential, many challenges lie ahead as SSA, in general, and Victoria Falls, in particular, have yet to realise the sector's full potential (Christie et al., 2013). More fundamentally, significant inequalities exist regarding participation and value capture among actors (Akama et al., 2011; Garland, 2008; McEwen, 2013; Christian, 2016). These inequalities potentially mirror those previously imposed by colonial administrations. There is much literature to demonstrate that much of the tourism in SSA, including in Victoria Falls, emerged during colonial times and was thus framed within colonial imaginaries (Arrington-Sirois, 2017; Rogerson, 2023; Gissibl, 2016; Hom, 2012; Lwoga, 2013). As Castro (2017, p. 225) observes, “after the end of the 19th century, European imperial policy encouraged travel to overseas possessions not only as a means of (re)defining territory in a geographical sense but primarily as a reflection of emerging European nationalism, turning travel into a privileged means for legitimating the overseas provinces and for spreading propaganda about them. As a result, colonial tourism developed on various levels and fronts, promoting an overseas holiday experience that became a civilisational datum and a gauge of contemporary culture”. Munro (2021) has traced the emergence of colonial wildlife conservation initiatives in Africa from the late 19th century, which created different laws to restrict hunting and displaced African populations from national parks to create imperial privileged access to wildlife tourism. While imaginaries in Victoria Falls were less about wildlife and more about landscape colonial imaginaries, aptly captured in the works of Thomas Baines in the *London Journal* in 1864, the representations of landscape and wildlife shaped the racialised evolution of tourism and migration from Britain to colonies in Africa (McAleer, 2010).

More than 43 years after the collapse of colonialism in Zimbabwe, questions remain about whether colonially imposed structures of exclusion still exist and significantly influence the current nature of tourism value chains and their imaginaries. While much literature has emerged that discusses the challenges facing African tourism, surprisingly, very little attention has been paid to the historical genealogy of and connections between current tourism GVCs and colonialism. Therefore, our conceptual framework based on coloniality is “useful in revealing continuities from the colonial past and current racialised and hierarchical, modern and global world order” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). Coloniality is conceptualised as an invisible power structure that shapes and sustains asymmetrical power relations between the Global North and the Global South and between black and white at the local level, thus constraining and limiting African agency. Coloniality highlights the darker side of modernity and capitalism, a power that sustains colonial relations of exploitation and domination long after the end of colonialism (Maldonado-Torres, 2007). It manifests itself in four dimensions, including through control of the economy (*land appropriations, exploitation of labor, and control of African resources*); control of subjectivity and knowledge (*epistemological colonialism and re-articulation of African subjectivity, or thought inferior by a series of deficits and lacks*); control of authority (*maintenance of military superiority and monopolisation of means of violence*); and control of gender and sexuality as well as the introduction of western-centric education which displaces Indigenous knowledge (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012). We are more interested in economic continuities, and hence, our focus is on three of the above

dimensions, except for the dimension of control of gender and sexuality. Further, this study rides on emerging research in economic geography that calls for analysis of historical drivers of the current spatial organisation of economic activities (Martin & Sunley, Making history matter more in evolutionary economic geography, 2022). As Kalvelage et al. (2023, p2) observe, GVC research often does not recognise path dependencies and historical drivers of industrial organisation and argues for “the weights of history, culture and geography” to be recognised in value chain analysis to understand “the different pathways of economic change across varying social and geographical arenas” (Neilson & Pritchard, 2009). This approach partially responds to calls by Christian (2019), primarily directed at scholars from the Global South, to develop a research agenda that uncovers the racialised hierarchies embedded in current global institutions and spread throughout various geographies, in essence, a critical global race theory.

In the following section, we introduce two concepts: the global tourism value chains (GVC) framework and Coloniality of power and its applicability in explaining value chain evolution and governance in postcolonial African states. We then combine these two concepts as part of our proposed framework for analysing GVCs through a historical lens. This approach allows us to situate power relations, governance and institutional structures that shape and mediate racialised participation and uneven value capture within their appropriate context. The third section covers our methodology. In the results section, we trace the colonial history of tourism development in Victoria Falls. We present empirical evidence on value chain mapping and how colonial matrices of power trap the Victoria Falls tourism GVC. Finally, we discuss the results and conclusions of our study.

5.2 Towards a Conceptual Framework on Coloniality of Tourism GVCs

This section presents a conceptual framework anchored on synthesising GVC and Coloniality concepts. GVCs refer to the full range of activities that firms and workers perform to bring a product from conception to end use. This includes activities such as design, production, marketing, distribution and support to the final consumer (Crescenzi & Harman, 2022, p. 29). GVCs allow us to understand the global division of labor, the distribution of rewards, and the resulting developmental impacts of such processes. Research that adopts GVC mapping frameworks in the service sector, like tourism, remains rare and continues to have a “manufacturing bias” (Kleibert, 2016; Song et al., 2013, for a review). Some scholars conceptualise the tourism industry as comprising “no single product but rather a wide range of products and services that interact to provide an opportunity to fulfil a tourist experience that comprises both tangible parts (e.g., hotel, restaurant, or air carrier) and intangible parts (e.g., sunset, scenery, mood)” (Judd, 2006, p. 325). This definition is helpful, but it has its challenges; it would be expedient to identify the tourist experience as a singular product of the industry and specify the inputs that determine the nature of the experience. As Judd (2006, p 328) observes, “the three main inputs to the tourist experience are image, investments in place infrastructure and labor, as represented through the work of tour operators and some other providers and workers”. The tourist is thus at the centre of the value chain. The product of the

tourism industry is thus the tourist experience created or manufactured by institutions and actors and priced in a market system (Judd, 2006, p. 327). Tourism in Africa is characterised by dependence on international tourism, a more substantial role of global lead firms and a weak domestic tourism sector (Daly, 2017; Daly & Gereffi, 2018)

Our second concept relates to the Coloniality of power, which highlights the darker side of modernity, a power that sustains colonial relations of exploitation and domination long after the end of colonialism (Maldonado-Torres, 2007). We hypothesise that GVCs in SSA are captive and *not free of these colonial matrices of power that underpin Coloniality*. Firstly, it is essential to differentiate between colonialism and Coloniality. Colonialism “denotes a political and economic relation in which the sovereignty of a nation or a people rests on the power of another nation, which makes such a nation an empire. Coloniality, instead, refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations” (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p. 243). The pervasive rationality of this power is two-fold: the social classification of the world's population around the idea of race, including Eurocentrism and the articulation of a structure of control of labor and its resources and products based on capital and the world market (Quijano & Ennis, 2000, p. 533). Coloniality is related to and similar to post-colonialism. The difference is minute and one of academic discipline or perspective, dealing with how the West imposed a ‘universal’ model of ‘modernity’ on other parts of the world through imperial invasion and colonial governance (Bhabra, 2014). We use the more precise term, Coloniality of Power (Stump, 2018).

Coloniality as a concept emerged from the anti-colonial intellectual struggles of South America in which Marxist scholars like Anibal Quijano (2007) argued in his seminal work that colonial matrices of power operate in four interrelated domains, that is, control of the economy (*land appropriation, exploitation of labor, control of natural resources*); control of authority; control of gender and sexuality (*family, education*); and control of subjectivity and knowledge (*epistemology, education and formation of subjectivity*). Each of these domains represents a site of conflict/ struggle over control and domination in which the imposition of a particular economy, structure of authority and particular lifestyle departs from the pre-colonial order. In practice, Coloniality emerged around the 16th century with the emergence of the Atlantic commercial circuit, the European appropriation of land, the massive exploitation of labor, the slave trade, the extraction of gold and silver, and the plantation economy (Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2009).

The colonial matrix of power has undergone successive and cumulative periods beginning with theology and the mission to convert to Christianity (16th-17th century); the civilisation mission led by England and France (end of 17th century) was the second stage; the third stage was the developmental and modernising mission led by the USA that began after 1945; from 1970-2000 the neoliberalism stage followed and its mission translated from development and modernisation into the Washington Consensus or granting the market economy over social regulation. This historical articulation is crucial because it shows that “what began as violent

colonisation was accompanied by various epistemological interventions, some religious and others secular. Therefore, any systematic mapping of the making of the colonial world and inscription of colonial modernity in Africa is a study of the history of global power construction whose structure and framework continue to shape social and political relations across the globe” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). In conclusion, therefore, it can be argued that the current state of Africa or broadly the Global South in which Africans are struggling to participate in the global economy (GVCs) and thus capture little value from it can be traced back to the dawn of the Euro-North American centric modernity (Sarmento & Rink, 2022; Mbembe, 2001; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2014, p. 187).

We now propose a framework for analysing the relationship between Tourism GVCs using Coloniality. The framework links the four areas of exclusion with concepts of Coloniality. To operationalise the concept, we identify relevant measures for each matrix that link with our areas of exclusion and are derived from coloniality literature (Maldonado-Torres, 2007). For example, Control of the economy as a matrix of coloniality manifests in exclusionary market access, racialised labour relations⁵ and land dispossessions (access), while control of knowledge in colonial imagery of Victoria Falls and control of authority in business setup and captured local institutions. Further, we show how and which GVC stages (point of capture) are affected by Coloniality, as shown in Figure 9. Each stage of the tourism GVC is affected by a particular type of matrix of Coloniality. We provide a schematic representation of the inter-relationships between GVCs and Coloniality below in Figure 9.

⁵ Methodologically, we do not investigate racial labor relations (*which explains why the relationships are in dotted lines*). We believe this an area for future research

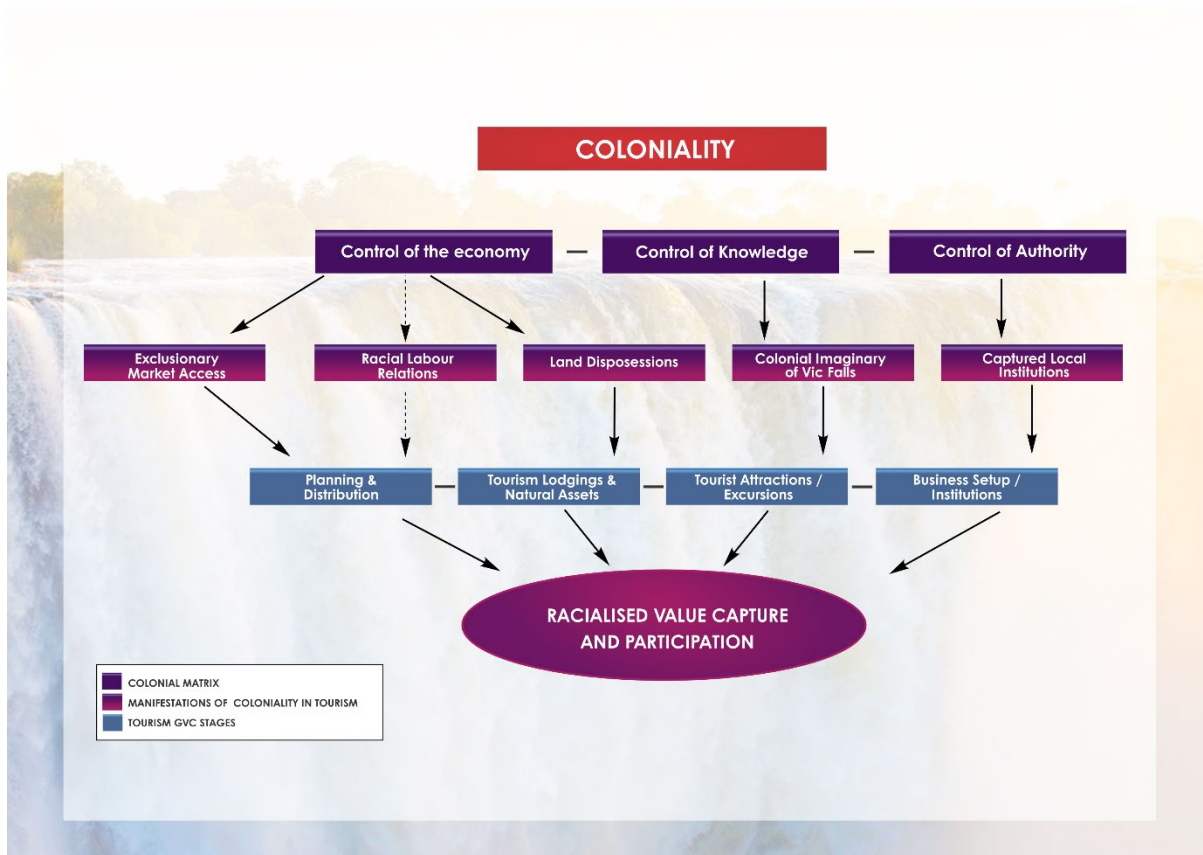


Figure 9: Model to Represent Coloniality of Tourism GVCs

5.3 Methods -GVC Mapping and Analysis

Global Value Chain (GVC) research can be distilled into two fundamental methodologies: value chain mapping and value chain analysis. The former, value chain mapping (*identifying who and where*), involves uncovering the entities and their geographic placements that participate in the journey of a product or service from conception to final consumption. This encompasses firms, products, activities, stakeholders, and geographic locations. On the other hand, value chain analysis, the latter approach, is concerned with inquiries into the "what" and "why" factors. It involves dissecting the impact of certain elements, such as governance, institutions, and interfirm relationships, on a product or service's trajectory, growth, and competitiveness (Frederick, 2019, p.31). In this research, we endeavour to fuse these two methodologies. The initial step involves identifying the spectrum of entities—firms, products, activities, stakeholders, and geographical regions—collectively constituting the tourism value chain in Victoria Falls. This comprehensive identification forms the basis of our value chain mapping. Subsequently, our analysis looks into the intricate interplay of forces of Coloniality with tourism GVC in line with our framework above.

This mapping is achieved through a qualitative approach involving extensive documentary analysis of previous studies, academic literature, tourism establishments' annual reports, 25 key

informant interviews, and two focus group discussions conducted between August and December 2022. Our key informants included officials from the City of Victoria Falls, the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority, the CEOs and owners of tourist enterprises in Victoria Falls, Destination Management Companies and Travel agents and the Tourism Police Management. The data revealed 253 registered operators in Victoria Falls. Subsequently, a systematic random selection process was undertaken, resulting in 25 participants being chosen for key informant interviews. This approach ensured a diverse and representative range of perspectives for our analysis. The primary focus of our research encompassed two distinct focus group discussions, engaging 11 participants in total. The participants included indigenous/ black entrepreneurs as well as Tourism Management authorities. Our central objective was to gain comprehensive insights into the landscape of opportunities and challenges small-scale entrepreneurs face as they navigate the industry. During these discussions, our inquiry spanned a broad spectrum of subjects. We aimed to uncover the driving motivations behind the inception of their enterprises, delving into the intricacies of their financial foundations. Moreover, we sought to grasp the multifaceted process of registering tourist facilities while exploring their strategies for attracting tourists to their establishments. Furthermore, we aimed to explain the value they derive from their business endeavours, the nature of their relationships within the industry, and their collaborative ties with local and international tour companies, among other topics. We intended to capture a holistic and authentic understanding of their experiences by placing small entrepreneurs at the heart of our investigation. We also review historical, archival material and studies on the history of Victoria Falls to understand the present within the prism of history- path-dependent processes.

Further, we mapped the value chain by employing GIS and creating comprehensive profiles of selected actors and firms following the approach laid out by Gereffi (1994). Given the paramount importance of location in the tourism industry, our objective was to decipher the underlying rationale and significance of firms' locational choices. The results are shown in a map in Figure 12 and demonstrate the relationship between past and present land ownership patterns.

5.4 Results: Connecting the Victoria Falls GVC and Coloniality

In the following section, we use our framework to demonstrate that the current configuration of the Victoria Falls value chain (GVC) and the associated dynamics are the outcomes of historical factors, most notably colonialism. We begin this presentation with a brief history of colonial conquest to set the base for our analysis.

5.4.1 Colonial Conquest and Emergence of Tourism in Victoria Falls

In this brief historical outline, we trace the evolution of the journey of colonial conquest and its relationship with tourism developments in the Victoria Falls region to illuminate past continuities in the current nature of the tourism GVC. JoAnn McGregor observes, “Victoria Falls is one of Africa's most well-known geographical features. Its international fame has

depended on notions of natural form and beauty rooted in European romantic and natural history tradition... However, the growth of a tourist resort around the waterfall from 1900 did not depend on scenery alone. It was the product of the material interests and marketing of a tourist industry, whose increasing geographical reach was very much an effect of imperialism..." (McGregor, 2003 p717). British occupation in the "Zimbabwe" region (Southern Rhodesia) began with the arrival of the Pioneer Column in 1890, financed by Cecil John Rhodes, owner of the British South Africa Company (BSAC) (Mlambo, 2014, p. 5). This followed the signing of the Rudd Concession, granting extensive mineral rights to the BSAC by King Lobengula in Matabeleland and the Royal Charter in October 1889, granting Cecil Rhodes permission to colonise and administer Zimbabwe on behalf of Britain to earn profits (Phimister, 1974, p. 75). Following this conquest, Chief Lewanika of the Lozi, who occupied land in Zambezi North (now Zambia), sought to avoid the violence and subjugation that had befallen the Ndebele down South and negotiated alliances with the British that led to the Lochner and, later, the Lawley concessions giving extensive mineral rights in Zambia and ceding land around Victoria Falls occupied by the Tonga (Leya) people, who were never consulted in these colonial agreements (Clay, 1968, p59).

By 1895, the British South Africa Company (BSAC) had seized control of the regional economy stretching from Cape Town to Victoria Falls, "stealing cattle", displacing Indigenous populations from fertile lands and forcing them to engage in waged labor within farms, mines, and emerging commercial enterprises (Gann, 1965). The Masters and Servants Act of Britain, adopted in 1901, cemented these changes, which were meant to enforce waged labor and ensure the extraction of maximum profits from the colony (Mlambo, 2019, p. 439; Gwisai, 2009). An influx of British emigrants flooded the country, searching for economic opportunities in response to massive propaganda driven by the Livingstone Newspapers, the Rhodesian Herald and the Bulawayo Chronicle (Bonello, 2010, p. 345). Land dispossessions that began in 1895 were legalised through the Land Apportionment Act of 1930 and continued revisions to concessions by Chief Lewanika up North (Marks, 1999, p. 557). The Land Apportionment Act "barred African land ownership outside the reserves, except in special small freehold purchase areas- much of it isolated and Tsetse-infested. By 1937, at least half the fertile land was allocated to whites mainly for Agriculture, 30 per cent Africans for reserve settlement" (Marks, 1999, p. 560). Around Victoria Falls, British colonial settlers displaced the Tonga subgroup, the Leya, from the land to begin building settlements. The mushrooming colonial settlements meant that the Leya people could not perform their ceremonies around the falls and that access to the Zambezi River for fishing and other trade activities had been cut off. This signified one of the earliest instances of exclusion in value capture and participation, as the Leya had been offering their expert services to the Ndebele, the Kololo and the Lozi, all of whom had long sought assistance in crossing the river (McGregor, 2003, p. 720). The displacements led to the creation of the rainforest and, later, a national park around the falls meant to "save" it from local people, representing a form of environmental colonialism (Nelson, 2003). The Zambezi River and Victoria Falls played strategic roles in the lives of the Leya or "Bamulwizi," meaning the river people (McGregor, 2009, p. 25). They regarded the river as a source of refuge, fertility,

power, and truth, using it for healing diseases. For instance, today's Devil's Pool was a place for healing, while other sections were designated for rainmaking and sacred spiritual events. In the words of anthropologist Elizabeth Colson, who worked with the Tonga people along the Zambezi, this was a place of power par excellence (Colson, 1997). However, the increasing presence of "whites" altered the understanding of the roles of the rivers and the Falls as well as their historical significance. British colonial figure David Livingstone claimed to have "discovered" the falls (Livingstone, 1858, p. 519), while Cecil John Rhodes envisioned the area as the launching point for his Cape to Cairo project (McGregor, 2009).

Thus, Victoria Falls emerged "squarely and multidimensionally" as a contested terrain in many ways: Europeans imagined it as a space for launching a modern British South Africa; its geography marked the ephemeral space where Southern Africa gave way to central Africa, while locals saw it as a space for spiritual expression (Arrington-Sirois, 2017, p. 3). As early as 1898, the colonial settlers under the BSAC declared that "...now that the territory has been ceded to the British South Africa Company... there is reason to suppose that...the newly-acquired territory will be the scene of considerable activity on the part of the new owners" (BCA (1898) in Arrington-Sirois (2017, p. 3). This vision did not include the participation of the local tribes in valorising the Falls and the Zambezi River.

This landmark, known as Mosi-oa-Tunya – the Smoke that Thunders, was renamed Victoria Falls after the reigning queen of Great Britain (1837-1901) by David Livingstone, thus beginning the erasure of local memory and value associated with it by the native population, representing a form of colonial conquest. The politics of naming Victoria Falls is racially charged. The local Leya, who lived closest to the falls, used the name "Syuungwe na Mutitima," meaning heavy mist that sounds. In contrast, the Kololo, who seemed to have collaborated with David Livingstone and did not reside close to the falls, called it "Mosi-oa-Tunya, the smoke that thunders" as the mist from the falls resembled smoke from a distance (See McGregor, 2009, for a more extensive discussion). However, David Livingstone chose to popularise the description he recorded from his Kololo associates. German Anthropologist Johannes Fabian observes that "selecting and imposing names and ways of writing them belonged to the exercise of colonial power over language" (Fabian, 1986, p. ix). Naming was thus fundamental to the extension of imperial control over physical and human environments (Williamson, 2023).

While land dispossession continued, a new racist travel and tourism culture emerged, relegating black people from land ownership and from consuming tourist products. While this conquest cemented the racial takeover of the falls, tourism started building after David Livingstone's visit. In 1870, 50 tourists (mainly British) visited the falls. George Westbeeck, an ivory trader and pioneer traveller, facilitated their visit (Shaw & Parsons, 1989). Westbeeck was to pioneer British travel and constructed a global value chain for racially and colonially based tourism. "It was Westbeeck who established the trek route from Tati to the Zambezi, which is now followed by the Botswana-Zimbabwe border, through his main trading station at Mpandamatenga. He also established the first regular vehicle ferry from Kazungula to the north bank of the Zambezi, using two canoes lashed in catamaran fashion to ferry ox wagons" (Shaw

& Parsons, 1989, p. 153). This route still exists and is responsible for thousands of tourists from Botswana to Zimbabwe for day trips to Victoria Falls. Westbeeche collaborated with local Matebele Chiefs, Chief Lewanika of Lozi, and local Makololo men stationed at Victoria Falls to welcome guests. These Makololo men may be seen as the first black/ local value chain actors in the emergent global tourism value chain (The Geographical Journal, 1901, p. 584). The benefits to the locals are unclear, but Westbeeche is said to have moved about 24,000 lbs of ivory out of the Zambezi area between April 1876 and March 1877 alone (Sampson, 1972, p. 65), and the facilitation of early tourism was certainly only a by-product of Westbeeche's flourishing wildlife-based business.

In this context, establishing the first modern hotel in Victoria Falls in 1904, known as the Victoria Falls Hotel, held particular significance due to its world-class culinary services. The hotel's kitchen was operated by a skilled French Chef, assisted by Arab waitstaff (Arrington-Sirois, 2017). The hotel still has an Edwardian Pool and the Livingstone dining room, which continue to reflect its century-old style of 'grandeur and opulence'. Hotels, as crucial spaces of welcome, association and entertainment, became important political sites (Craggs, 2012). These hotels created a space to perform colonial ideologies and identities. The hotels became 'European' sociability places where the colour bar was enacted. Since most were privately owned, blacks were frequently not allowed through enforced residential segregation. The hotel represented colonial progress and civility, although it was not available to Africans (Craggs, 2012, p. 216). Within the context of Southern and Northern Rhodesia, "Victoria Falls luxury hotels compelled many white settlers to move to this African frontier that pushed white entrepreneurs into this frontier landscape, accelerated the colonisation process and influenced the discourse about colonial goals. The Falls inspired enthusiasm and ambition among these entrepreneurs who hoped to build a modern tourist destination as an oasis of Western civilisation in what they perceived as an untamed frontier" (Arrington-Sirois, 2017).



Figure 10: Victoria Falls Hotel (1920)

Source: By permission from Victoria Falls Hotel (www.victoriafallhotel.com)

Following this, German explorer Edward Mohr created and named the place around Victoria Falls Gorge the rainforest. By 1920, a thriving regional tourist industry had emerged, propelled mainly by Thomas Cook and Sons, a British travel agency that promoted Victoria Falls as a luxurious resort (Arrington-Sirois, 2017). Thomas Cook organised the first Cape to Cairo tour, passing through Victoria Falls and arranged various activities, including sporting tournaments that drew tourists from afar. However, these sporting events primarily reflected a European leisure style and did not resonate with the local population. In an interview, one prominent entrepreneur in the tourism business in Victoria Falls argued that these exotic activities propelled and pivoted thriving adrenaline tourism into the early 1980s, representing these connections between past and present. As the local population was displaced, "new symbolic appropriations of the river in the early twentieth century depended on the mutual admiration of colonial administrators and Lozi royalty, often at the expense of the rights of the local people, the Leya" (McGregor, 2003, p. 719). Arrington-Sirois (2017, p. 15) concludes, "Victoria Falls was no longer a local asset—by the early twentieth century, it was considered one of the most important resources in British Southern Africa." In conclusion, while this historical overview may not cover every detail, it does illustrate a clear pattern of how global enclave tourism emerged during the early days of colonialism.

5.4.2 The Victoria Falls Tourism Value Chain Map

Below, we present the five segments of the GVC mapping results for the Victoria Falls Value chain. These segments include the market (customer), composed mainly of international,

regional, and domestic tourists. This value chain map is based on conversations with key informants and sketch maps developed during focus group discussions with key actors in Victoria Falls. Victoria Falls receives various segments of tourists, including regional (within Africa) and international (Europe, Americas, Asia). However, most regional tourists frequently transit to other countries and spend less than three days in Victoria Falls. International tourists tend to have the largest per dollar spend in Victoria Falls. This way, international tourists dominate the Value Chain as significant customers. Victoria Falls receives about 700,000 international tourists annually (Zimbabwe Tourism Authority, 2018). These numbers are enormous and result in international tourists dominating the value chain. The Government of Zimbabwe, with a grant from the Exim Bank of China, upgraded the Victoria Falls Airport, boosting its annual handling capacity from 500,000 to 1.7 million passengers. Since becoming operational in 2017, the airport has seen a 40% rise in international arrivals (Zimbabwe Tourism Authority, 2022). During key informant interviews, all major hotel groups indicated that over 90 per cent of their guests are international.

The second segment is composed of GVC intermediaries who are responsible for planning and distribution within the GVC. Given that they control the market, they have significant leverage and value capture potential since the most powerful are in major source markets of Europe and the USA. The Thomsons USA, Tourvest South Africa, Vayeni, Africa Travel and African Eden are some significant players. We also identify local institutions that manage and facilitate the value chain's governance in Victoria Falls. These include the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority, the Hospitality Association of Zimbabwe, Government (Ministry of Environment and Tourism and Finance), the Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area, the City of Victoria Falls, the Zimbabwe National Parks and Wildlife Management, Tourism Business Council of Zimbabwe, the Hospitality Association of Zimbabwe, the Association of Zimbabwe Travel Agents, the Tourism Police Unit, the Victoria Falls Tour Guides Association, Civil Aviation Authority and Pristine Victoria Falls. The last two segments include lodgings and excursions, encompassing the various accommodation facilities and services/ activities. Figure three below depicts the schematic representation of the value chain.

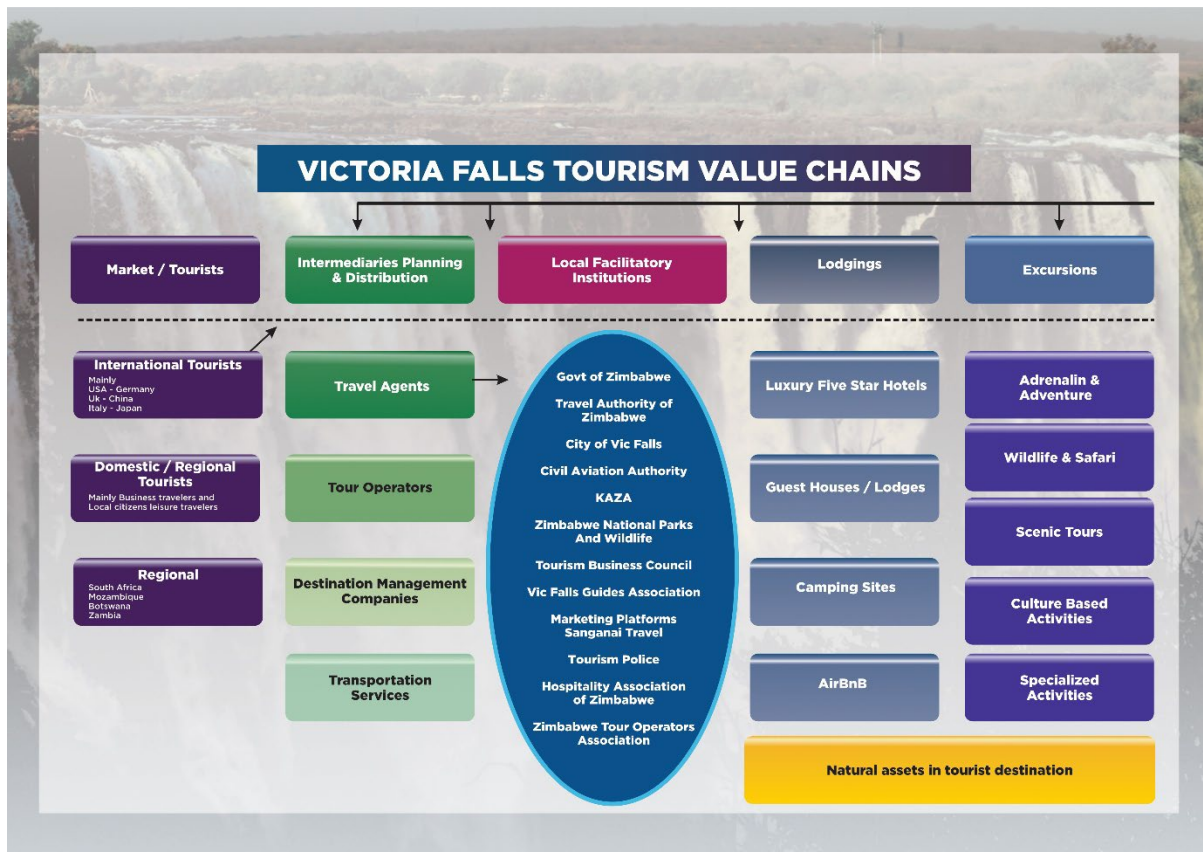


Figure 11: Victoria Falls Value Chain Map

Source: Adapted from (Christian, 2010)

5.4.3 Four Areas of Exclusion in the Victoria Tourism Value Chains

I. Access to Land (Due to Colonial Land Dispossession): Tourism Lodgings and natural assets

One of the defining features of Coloniality espoused above is control of the economy, which manifests itself through land appropriation, labour exploitation, and control of natural resources (Maldonado-Torres, 2007). We have already demonstrated how the British Empire and the British South African Company grabbed land from the local Leya people who occupied Victoria Falls around 1890. As McGregor (2003, p 734) observes, “the process of physical exclusion was most dramatic and most total on the south bank (Zimbabwe side), from which the Leya population was completely removed between 1900 and 1940”. In contemporary Victoria Falls, in the land surrounding Victoria Falls National Park and the entirety of Zambezi National Park, we find a glaring testament to the enduring consequences of land dispossession driven by colonialism. This territory, now under the stewardship of the Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority, bears witness to a troubling legacy of exclusion. While ostensibly prohibiting tourism development, this management authority paradoxically permits exhilarating activities such as white-water rafting, canoeing, bridge-based bungee jumping, and other adventure pursuits (Makuvaza, 2012, p. 47). These operations, predominantly

orchestrated by prominent entities like Shear Water and Wild Horizons with substantial foreign investments, underscore a disheartening reality.

In a focus group discussion (FDG), local and black entrepreneurs noted that proposals for excursions in protected areas from local, often black entrepreneurs have mostly been rejected. One prominent example was that in 2016, three Indigenous companies were denied licenses for land development near the rainforest, while Adage Success and Scanner Investments, two private foreign firms, secured approval. This arrangement is embroiled in a contentious lawsuit within the High Court of Zimbabwe⁶. FDG participants also pointed out that Shear Water (white and foreign) owns a restaurant and sells curios inside the reserved area of the Victoria Falls Rainforest (See also Makuvaza, 2012, p. 50). Also, of all the eleven black operators we spoke to, none of their enterprises are nested within the vicinity of the Zambezi River and Victoria Falls. Furthermore, none of the eleven black entrepreneurs we engaged with established businesses near the Zambezi River and Victoria Falls. This seemingly simplistic preference for resource-endowed entrepreneurs belies a complex truth. Land ownership is intricately entangled with historical patterns of exclusion, with black communities historically barred from access to the coveted Victoria Falls vicinity. In 2000, Zimbabwe implemented a massive and often violent land reform program that redistributed mainly agricultural land (Moyo, 2013); however, much of the land in special zones like Victoria Falls retains its colonial character due to a variety of interstate conservation laws, leading to a racial, environmental gap itself a constituent of racial capitalism. The environmental racism gap “highlights the persistent *inequality* between white and nonwhite communities. This gap manifests itself in practices, regulations, and outcomes” (Pulido, 2016, p. 524). The result is racialised access to spatial areas. One of the participants in the FDGS noted, “Colonialism ended over 40 years ago, but we still see its effects on land patterns in Victoria Falls. That is why you see none of us here operates from the banks of the river where most tourists prefer to visit”. The map below demonstrates the enduring and troubling legacy of exclusion, in which historical forms of land ownership prevent black-owned enterprises from having land in the vicinity of Victoria Falls. We surveyed 82 randomly selected enterprises in Victoria Falls and classified them as foreign/white-owned and black/indigenous. The results are revealing.

⁶ See, for example <https://www.newsday.co.zw/theindependent/local-news/article/200010459/vic-falls-rainforest-court-case-rages>

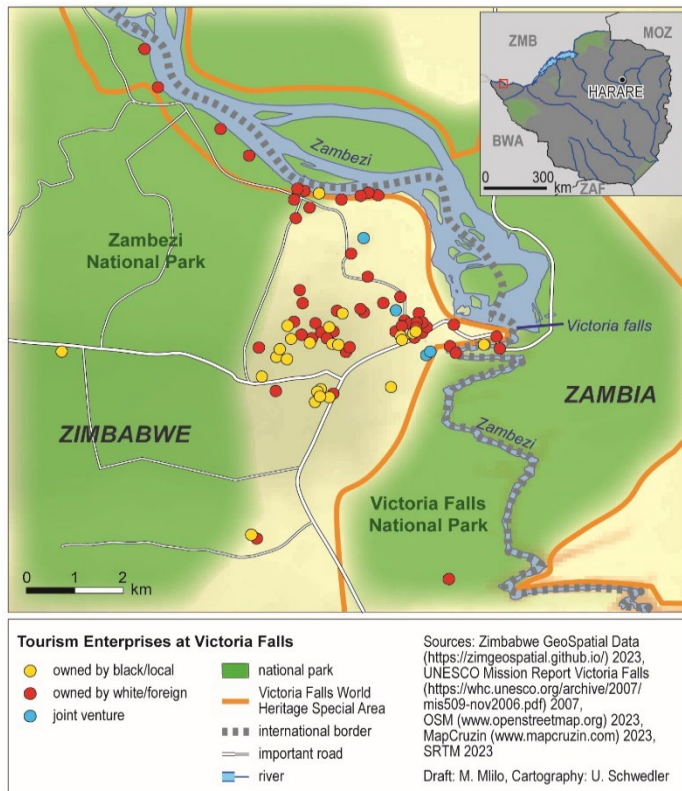


Figure 12: Map showing locational patterns of tourism firms in Victoria Falls

II. Exclusionary Market Access: Planning and Distribution (Tour Operators, Travel Agents)

Tourism in Victoria Falls was a by-product of economic interests and fascination with the ‘African Wild’ in the region in which the white settler regimes sought to create a tourist resort primarily for the consumption of Westerners (Prendergast & Adams, 2003). Thomas Cook, the first travel agent in the region, planned and built a tourist resort whose only major client was the Westerner. There is evidence of local Lozi being part of the early value chain formation as curio trade, carving business owners, and occupying elite roles in hotels requiring some primary education (Caplan, 1970). Further, McGregor (2003) and Arrington-Sirois (2017) note, however, that these early African businesses were limited to the Lozi Aristocracy and were built to the tastes of Europeans (Bull, 1969). They also show that travel agents like Percy Clark had few relationships with local Africans but were connected to an emerging class of white businesses that had settled in Livingstone. By 1920, the construction of the railway line meant that about five trips were organised a year from Cape Town to Victoria Falls by pioneers like Percy Clark (Heath, 1977, p. 24). Another prominent travel agent, Farrell Lines, organised groups of about 5,000 per year carrying tourists from New York to Cape Town to Victoria Falls by train (Pirie, 2011, p. 75). So it was that the global tourism industry that emerged from Victoria Falls was built to serve the interests of white settlers in Southern Africa and European and American travellers.

Our analysis of conversations from FDGs, key informants and reports from the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority reveals that the architecture of the Anglo-American-centric tourism value

chain remains stubbornly in place in Victoria Falls. Notably, African travel records the lowest duration of stay and expenditure, making international tourism the main driver for Victoria Falls' economy, reflecting the same trends during colonialism (ZTA, 2022). A survey by the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority revealed that Europeans typically spend approximately ten days during their travels, with an expenditure of around US\$909 per individual. In contrast, local travellers tend to spend a shorter duration of 3-7 days, with an average expenditure of about US\$310 (ZTA, 2022). Britain consistently boasts the highest among European markets (about 38%, trailing only behind the USA's significant influence). This inclination towards foreign visitors is mirrored in hotel occupancy statistics in 2018, where 72% of stays were by international travellers compared to 28% of local stays, often for business purposes. This trend aligns with broader African tourism dynamics marked by limited domestic demand (Christie et al., 2013). This reliance on foreign spending challenges local entrepreneurs, hindering their access to the tourism value chain. The crucial role of Global Lead firms (tour operators and destination management firms) in driving tourist arrivals is evident, primarily in source markets. The Thomsons USA, Tourvest South Africa, Vayeni, and African Eden are some of the major players in the industry. However, local entrepreneurs have voiced concerns about the difficulties in securing contracts due to the dominance of established, often white players. Tour operators argue that emerging businesses need help to meet the high standards expected by international tourists, hindering trust-building efforts. Tourists also tend to use tour operators based in their home region who have connections with white businesses in Zimbabwe. One owner of a black-led lodge in Victoria Falls lamented, "We have long stopped expecting foreign tourists... the truth is they will not come... our business depends on domestic tourism." This sentiment was echoed by several black entrepreneurs, underscoring the challenges they face in entering the value chain. Relying on individual and local travellers makes capturing significant proceeds from the value chain challenging. The conclusion is that the value chain in Victoria Falls is controlled by global lead firms in major source markets like the USA and Britain. These lead firms prefer to work and contract white-owned enterprises based in Victoria Falls, reflecting colonial lines of exclusion.

On the surface, these challenges seem apparent, but a deeper analysis reveals that invisible racial capitalist ideologies drive these practices that promote inequitable access to networks and customers. Other scholars have come to the same conclusion; for example, Christian (2015) finds similar repertoires in her investigation of tourism growth in Costa Rica and calls them racial neoliberalism. She argues that racial neoliberalism exemplifies the modern way in which race is intertwined with global capitalism. Her study concludes that racial neoliberal networks assign different values to Black and white bodies, placing each in specific tourism roles deemed suitable for their respective skills and the demands of international tourism. This assignment is normalised to meet perceived tourism needs and desires (Christian, 2015, p. 183).

III. Colonial Imageries of Victoria Falls: Tourist attractions and excursions

Much literature has emerged about the tourist imagery of scenery, leisure and luxury at Victoria Falls, which excluded all Africans (Beinart, 1990). Much of the tourism emerged mainly as

hunting expeditions to the “untamed African wild”, which reflected the Victorian hunting cults associated with the English upper classes and later to view the attractions of Victoria Falls (MacKenzie, 1957, p. 52). The image of the “Great White Hunters” led to a severe depletion of wildlife populations in Southern Africa, resulting in the establishment of game reserves. As conservation concerns grew, African animals began to take on a new global significance (Steinhart, 1989). The footprint of game hunting and conservation tourism remains deeply connected to colonial history (Garland, 2008; Holstein & Head, 2018). Several scholars have also documented the British racialisation and fetishisation of the Lozi royalty under King Lewanika through photography, security, education, images of modernity, and gifts (Steinhart, 1972; Gwyn, 1990). In 1902, King Lewanika, regarded as the first recognised African traditional leader at the international level, was invited to the coronation of Edward VII, returning and adopting the uniform of the British Admiral of the Fleet. This perception of Lewanika and the Lozi greatly influenced their relationship with other local tribes. Lewanika increased extravagant displays and indulged in European types of leisure, the most prominent being the Zambezi River boat pageant (McGregor, 2003). Over time, a growing cosmopolitan society developed along the falls, where Africans “appropriated” European leisure, sports, and clothing ostensibly designed for tourism (Arrington-Sirois, 2017). This marked the gradual erasure of traditional Lozi and Leya customs as many Africans slowly Europeanized to benefit from a burgeoning social scene driven by tourism.

The local Leya and Lozi had used the waterfall and the river as a religious site, which connected them to their ancestors, but “the growing amenities and activities offered by the hotels and other new local entrepreneurs, and the itineraries promoted in the guides, represented a profound transformation of the way the landscape could be imagined and experienced. It became a place for picnics, luxury, sunset views, rainforest walks, sport fishing and shooting (See, for example, Mackintosh, 1922). This is not surprising given the investments made by the British in Tourism in Victoria Falls throughout colonial history, from transport infrastructure (the Bridge and railway line in 1904) to hotels. For example, at least seven luxury foreign tourism-related infrastructure projects (mainly hotels) were built between 1968 and 1979, amounting to over six million pounds to cater to the expanding foreign-based tourist market (Munjaidi, 2019, p. 136).

The footprint of the above imagery and foreign investments is reflected in today’s Tourism GVC. We identified and surveyed 52 distinct activities within the Victoria Falls region to demonstrate these connections. This comprehensive catalogue was compiled through a meticulous examination of the online platforms of registered service providers. Furthermore, we interviewed key stakeholders, including the Victoria Falls Tourist Centre manager and officials from the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority. Our analysis has led us to categorise these activities into five primary domains: Adrenaline and adventure, Wildlife and Safari, Scenic Tours, Culturally Based Experiences, and Specialised Activities. In value generation, we have examined the entities responsible for providing these activities, focusing on those contributing significantly to overall value creation. We observed that big players like Shear Water and Wild Horizons (All White/ Foreign) take the most significant share as they can provide services

across all five sectors. For example, at their peak, the two companies employ about 900 professionals; they own about 20 other sub-companies in Victoria Falls, are major activity providers, and have an estimated US\$100 million annual turnover. Using their 1000 vehicles, they transport over 4,000 guests daily, over eight lodges can accommodate over 200 guests, and they own six top restaurants in Victoria Falls.

In our focus group discussion, the Victoria Falls Tour Guides Association Chairperson noted this as a significant challenge: "Big white players can entertain the guests from arrival to exit, providing non-stop activities and virtually shutting out all the small players. We see tourists coming in and out of the falls with little access. The coupon system also means they do not spend cash on activities". Among the top activities is the visit to the Victoria Falls rainforest (created in early 1904), which emerged as the most popular attraction, both locally and nationally. Foreign tourists constitute a substantial majority of rainforest visitors, as evidenced by statistics from 2018, where out of 957,752 tourists who visited national parks, approximately 62% chose to visit the rainforest, with 71% being of foreign origin. In the specific context of Victoria Falls, a staggering 78% of all rainforest visitors are foreigners (ZTA, 2022). These statistics reflect patterns seen and established during colonialism.

While comprehensive data regarding the modes of transportation to the rainforest is unavailable, insights from an interview with Rain Forest management suggest that over 82% of visitors arrive as part of organised tours within group settings. Notably, Wild Horizons and Shear Water are significant players in this group. Africa Travel, owned by Lovemore Machipisa, an Indigenous/ black entrepreneur, is seriously competing with traditional players. Given the prominence of the mature safari traveller demographic and the considerable travel distances to Zimbabwe, there is a compelling rationale for investments in offline marketing efforts and robust partnerships with key agents and operators. These partnerships can encompass cooperative marketing initiatives and supported hosted buyer programs, although such endeavours necessitate significant financial investments—a challenge often beyond the means of small and local entrepreneurs. Another high-value activity is the helicopter ride- the second most popular in terms of use and revenue. One of the participants in the FGDs noted, "Only three companies operate the service with Zambezi helicopters, which Wild Horizons and Shear Water own and take over 90% of the market". The trend is unmistakable: lucrative returns and widely favoured activities are controlled by a tightly-knit network of predominantly foreign-white-owned corporations.

IV. Business Setup and Captured Local Institutions (Control of Authority)

Institutions of authority, once in the hands of colonial administrators who managed tourism development, including local government, the Police, Ministries, and the Victoria Falls Tourism Trust, for example, fell with the end of colonialism in 1980. However, the current nature of institutions continues to reflect a colonial bias against black entrepreneurs. Several institutions play a vital role in the GVC chain in Zimbabwe. Based on conversations with and review of company reports, we pieced out the decisive institutions in the value chain. These

are the marketing platforms, particularly the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority, the Hospitality Association of Zimbabwe, the Sanganai Travel Expo, the Africa Travel Indaba, World Travel Africa, Africa's Eden, and the International Tourism Fair, Berlin. At the local level, the institutions include the Government (Ministry of Environment and Tourism and Finance), the Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area, the City of Victoria Falls, the Zimbabwe National Parks and Wildlife Management, Tourism Business Council of Zimbabwe, the Hospitality Association of Zimbabwe, the Association of Zimbabwe Travel Agents, the Tourism Police Unit, the Victoria Falls Tour Guides Association, Civil Aviation Authority and Pristine Victoria Falls. The role of marketing platforms -dominated by global lead firms has already been discussed above; predominantly controlled by influential global corporations, the global firms play a central role in shaping the industry by driving visitor numbers and occupying a privileged position within the Global Value Chain (GVC). These entities wield significant influence over firms' operations within the tourism sector, profoundly impacting industry participants' intricate web of relationships.

The government is pivotal in formulating policies and legislation that influence the industry substantially. Notably, the Ministry of Finance designated Victoria Falls as a special economic zone in 2017, a designation officially becoming law in 2022 through statutory instrument four of that year. This particular law bestows upon Victoria Falls the status of an international financial services centre, enabling it to cater to clients beyond the confines of the domestic economy. While on the surface, this move is a step toward fostering foreign investment, it carries a particular nuance. In tandem with the Ministry's launch of the Victoria Falls Stock Exchange, it creates a global trading platform for stocks denominated in foreign currency. This endeavour attracts foreign investment from the southern African region and internationally into Zimbabwe. However, beneath this veneer of economic expansion, it can be argued that such policies safeguard and perpetuate the existing structures of investment that result in unequal participation and value capture within the industry.

The Zimbabwe Tourism Authority is pivotal in registering operators within the tourism sector. However, our interactions with entrepreneurs reveal that the relationship with this regulatory body, while vital for tourism growth, often leans towards exploitative rather than supportive, particularly for smaller businesses. Many industry participants find the taxes and fees associated with registration burdensome, with the US\$2500 fee required for participation in international marketing platforms being a prime example. As one local agent remarked, "Where do they expect us to get such monies? This is why I have never attended any tourism trade show in the ten years I have been operating". More prominent industry players also express dissatisfaction with the 2% tax imposed on all transactions within the sector. Moreover, various operational expenses, such as tour guide license fees, add to the financial strain. These regulatory fees and licensing requirements effectively force emerging players to operate on the fringes of legality. Engaging in tourism activities necessitates insurance registration to mitigate risks associated with tourists, but these insurance costs are prohibitively high for local operators. Consequently, global industry leaders place additional demands on smaller businesses. For instance, running a registered company with multiple licenses from the ZTA

and comprehensive insurance coverage becomes a prerequisite. While this may appear reasonable in the Zimbabwean and broader global southern context, it creates formidable entry barriers that hinder value generation and broader participation within the industry.

5.5 Towards an Agenda for Decolonising Tourism in Zimbabwe

Leading decolonial theorists have suggested that the first and fundamental step in decolonial research is understanding the impact of colonialism not as a historical episode but as a global, racialised process of dismemberment, domination, control, and exploitation (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015, p. 23). We have attempted to address this in the above critical narrative. However, a few fundamental questions remain at the heart of decolonial thinking: How can a ‘dismembered’ people be ‘re-membered’? How can they relaunch themselves from the world of ‘non-being’ into the world of ‘being’? How can they recapture their lost land, power, history, being, language, and knowledge? So far, socialism as a response to capitalism has failed, and dominant social science theories such as structuralism, postmodernism, and postcolonialism are experiencing epistemic limits (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015, p. 23; Boucher, 2019).

Accordingly, in line with the above open questions, we propose responses to each of the three forms of coloniality investigated in this paper. The first issue is the coloniality of knowledge, which focuses on teasing out epistemological issues, the politics of knowledge generation, and questions of who generates what knowledge, and for what purpose. (Quijano, 2007). Conceptually, decolonising knowledge begins with reorienting tourism studies, which are predominantly influenced by neoliberal paradigms—European and Anglo-derived knowledge production systems and extractive paradigms—toward more inclusive approaches (Bellato et al., 2023; Chambers & Buzinde, 2015). This task involves integrating local and Indigenous ways of knowing into research. It also includes restoring local names, such as “Syuungwe na Mutitima,” meaning heavy mist that sounds, and empowering the local Tonga/Leya people to become stewards of tourism development in Victoria Falls. Tourism’s current focus on international visitors must be balanced with domestic tourism that celebrates and empowers local communities. The COVID-19 pandemic and its disruptions have shown the limitations and the dangers that Africa faces due to its current structure of tourism (Ayikoru, 2024)

Secondly, the control of the economy (land, markets, and labor) means that Zimbabwe’s current land reform initiatives must be fast-tracked to ensure that Black and Indigenous players can access prime tourism spots along the Zambezi and Victoria Falls areas to redress injustices of the past (See Rastegar et al., 2023, *who reflect on just transition in tourism*). For instance, through its Kasane/Kazungula redevelopment plan, the Botswana government is implementing such an initiative and has provided substantial funding to local tourism players. Lastly, control of authority requires robust reform of institutions managing tourism in Zimbabwe. The Zimbabwe Tourism Authority and the local Tourism Police need training and capacity building to understand how to uplift local and Black players into the mainstream tourism industry. These approaches are not exhaustive but provide a foundation for conversations about essential reforms to transform tourism in Zimbabwe and Africa.

5.6 Conclusions

This paper investigates the intricate connections between structural inequalities rooted in colonialism and their enduring impact on today's tourism value chains. We applied the GVCs frameworks and the concept of Coloniality within the context of the tourism industry in Victoria Falls. Such an approach is rare in GVC research. Our findings reveal that the contemporary arrangements of the GVC system, which marginalise local stakeholders and concentrate value creation within global lead firms, can be directly traced back to the persistent legacy of colonialism. Across Sub-Saharan Africa, tourism GVCs continue to be entangled within the historical web of colonial power dynamics, preventing them from achieving true liberation. This colonial influence manifests in four interconnected domains characterised by exclusion, significantly shaping participation and value acquisition. These domains encompass control of the economy (access to land), market accessibility, challenges related to business establishment and capital availability, and the racialised imagery of Victoria Falls, all deeply entrenched in the history of colonialism. This view contrasts the popular narrative that the Victoria Falls value chain is successful, revealing that this success needs to be shared or questioned.

Secondly, our empirical contribution elucidates the entwinement of local institutions, relationships, and governance structures within the framework of global coloniality. By meticulously mapping the tourism value chain, we have unveiled the essential activities and critical actors responsible for generating substantial returns. Significantly, our analysis underscores how these profit-generating domains predominantly remain controlled by white and foreign-owned enterprises. Furthermore, we demonstrate how the dearth of domestic tourism demand accentuates the dominance of global lead firms in the governance of the value chain. On a local level, we shed light on how leisure activities framed within Eurocentric paradigms perpetuate and foster a tourism landscape primarily geared toward foreign visitors. These activities entail formidable barriers to entry and necessitate substantial investments for local stakeholders to participate effectively. Moreover, the prerequisites for firm establishment, including tax obligations, further constrain local entities' participation, relegating them to the periphery of the value chain in terms of value capture. We contend that the prevailing understanding of success within this value chain is firmly rooted in Eurocentrism, disregarding indigenous concepts of value acquisition and achievement. Consequently, local actors find themselves inadequately acknowledged for their contributions to the tourism sector, as the predominant foreign market does not readily consume their products. This inherent bias towards foreign preferences complicates upgrading the value chain for local stakeholders (Barrientos et al., 2010).

Our findings underscore the pivotal role of coloniality as a valuable analytical lens. By reframing colonial matrices within the Global Value Chain (GVC) framework, we contribute to the GVC literature by introducing a novel approach to enhance historical analysis in GVC research. This framework not only strengthens existing perspectives but also opens up new

avenues for conducting more robust empirical investigations in various contexts, thereby exposing historical injustices and inequities in the tourism sector. Although the field of Global Value Chain (GVC) research has historically overlooked the role of history in its analytical frameworks, it is imperative to recognise that research into uneven development lies at the core of GVC analysis. By delving into the uneven nature of development within GVCs, we also contribute to the "dark sides" literature within GVC research, which challenges the prevailing positive narratives often found in this literature (Coe & Hess, 2010; Morales & Atienza, 2022).

Future research could investigate labor relations in tourism Global Value Chains (GVCs), which were not the focus of this paper. There is scope to expose the multiple racial divisions of labor within and across value chain segments. Additionally, we see potential for investigating concerns about the GVC's dominance by the "Shona" tribal groups over local Ndebele and other tribal groups in key enterprise positions. Some of these divisions among Black African groups are remnants of colonial legacies. Lastly, advocate for adopting a decolonial research agenda to tackle the developmental hurdles outlined above in line with the emerging critical turn in tourism studies (Ateljevic et al., 2007a). This entails endeavours to reconceptualise tourism in Africa, prioritising the stimulation of domestic tourism and spotlighting Indigenous modes of tourism that empower local stakeholders for advancement. Additionally, a decolonial agenda must privilege indigenous forms of tourism (Nielsen & Wilson, 2012), challenge current Western-centric forms of tourism epistemology (Chambers & Buzinde, 2015; Naylor et al., 2018), and confront the complexities of land access, a pivotal resource within the industry. Research initiatives should also investigate financial mechanisms that bolster the competencies and capabilities of local participants in the value chain, enabling them to gain a more equitable share of the value created.

5.7 References

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6. Harnessing the Future for Cross-Border Tourism Development in Southern Africa

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Abstract

The influence of future visions and spatial imaginaries on new path development remains underexplored in economic geography research. We address this gap by analysing the history of future-oriented imaginaries and the evolution of pathways of tourism development in the Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area (KAZA). We conceptualise cross-border tourism development as a three-stage process: emergence, takeoff, and consolidation. This progression is driven by agentic mobilisation of knowledge, markets, financial investment, and legitimacy, as key resources for path creation. Our results show the power and limitations of spatial imaginaries on new path development in cross-border destinations.

Keywords: Path development, Cross-Border Tourism, Spatial Imaginaries

6.1 Introduction

Transboundary conservation areas (TBCAs) like the Kavango Zambezi Trans-Frontier Conservation Area (KAZA- TFCA) in Southern Africa are increasingly recognised as “integrated meeting grounds” and spaces of connectivity that can facilitate the emergence and growth of unified cross-border tourism spaces (Chaderopa, 2013; Flynn, 1997; Noe, 2020; Ramutsindela, 2007). TBCAs aim to establish large conservation and wildlife areas by integrating vast landscapes and reconnecting ecological systems across national boundaries. Developing TBCAs is also an exemplary process of partnerships between governments and the private sector (Quinn et al., 2012; Pringle, 2017). To achieve its ambitious goals, TBCAs can leverage tourism to mobilise the financial and technical resources needed for growth (Hanks, 2003; Scovronick & Turpie, 2009). Strategically, ‘supporters of transboundary conservation, particularly from global movements, advance visions of tourism growth’ to justify nature

conservation as a vehicle to achieve socio-economic benefits for the countries and people living around these regions (Bollig & Vehrs, 2021; Scovronick & Turpie, 2009, p. 149; Sandwith & Besancon, 2005). However, expanding tourism to support conservation and socio-economic development at this scale requires the emergence of cross-border tourism development (CBTD).

Presently, the role of borders, between countries, differing political systems, institutional disparities, and funding limitations appears to work against the development of CBTD (Stoffelen et al., 2017; Chaderopa, 2013). Many transboundary conservation areas (TBCAs) are shaped by top-down policies rather than local entrepreneurial agency, which could better support tourism growth. Tourism and path development literature (Benner, 2022; Butler, 1980; Halkier & Therkelsen, 2013; Ma & Hassink, 2013; Williams, 2013) has advanced our understanding of how tourism destinations evolve, particularly through the role of agency (Mlilo et al., 2024). However, as this paper argues, both fields still have limited insight into how forward-looking imaginaries or future visions influence destination path development, particularly in establishing CBTD. This is surprising because TBCAs, as long-term visions and spatial imaginaries, have played a critical role in nature conservation and tourism developments since colonial times (Sheng et al., 2022). We, therefore, seek to build on literature that examines TBCAs as spatial imaginaries/ future visions to evaluate how cross-border tourism emerges across various scales. Imaginaries and visions are essential in tourism development (Benner, 2021; Salazar, 2012) and can “assume causative power” for new path development.

Theoretically, we combine path development and future-oriented literature (imaginaries, narratives, and visions) to explain the emergence of cross-border tourism. There is growing concern and an expanding body of literature in economic geography about the impact of imaginaries, narratives, and visions on spatial economic processes (Benner, 2024; Gong, 2024; Miörner, 2020). Benner (2024, p.1) suggests that this trend may signify a critical emerging ideational turn, prompting us to consider how these concepts can influence new path development. Although these various concepts (*imaginaries, narratives, and visions*) are often used interchangeably, this paper focuses on spatial imaginaries and their impact on the development of cross-border tourism paths. Spatial imaginaries are pivotal in new path development by shaping our present, as they are “generative” and attract stakeholders to a new path (Steen, 2016, p. 1611).

While imaginaries have been applied broadly in economic geography and tourism studies for some time (Said, 2003; Silvey & Rankin, 2011), there is limited research on how actors utilise these spatial imaginaries to create and develop cross-border or transboundary regional development paths. As Hassink et al. (2019, p. 1638) observe, “little has been said about the potential influence of ‘the future’, that is, how conventions, expectations, and visions impact the rise and growth of industrial paths.” Current conceptualisations of new path development have relied on evolutionary (looking back) and institutional theories. Evolutionary processes assert that the distribution of economic activities across space results from “contingent, yet path-dependent, historical processes” (Boschma & Frenken, 2011, p. 296), while institutional theory emphasises region-specific formal and informal institutions as setting strong preconditions for regional development opportunities (Todtling & Trippl, 2005). Later, other conceptualisations of path development have emphasised the role of agency (Grillitsch & Sotarauta, 2020; Baekkelund, 2021; Isaksen et al., 2019; Benner, 2022). Agency is inter-temporal, and the conceptualisation of opportunity spaces in some agency concepts (Grillitsch & Sotarauta, 2020) suggests a future-looking perspective. However, the blind spot remains on the causative power of future imaginaries and other forward-looking perspectives in path development processes.

We address this gap through an empirical case that adopts imaginative research methods relevant for researching imaginaries to outline the foundational elements required to establish cross-border tourism destinations in post-colonial contexts (Gong, 2024). The starting point of analysis is the KAZA spatial imaginary and how it has evolved through the recollections of key actors on the ground. We focused on how actors mobilised four key resources, namely knowledge, markets, financial investment, and legitimacy (Binz et al., 2015, p. 301), to realise their goals. The rest of the paper is structured as follows: Section two restates the argument that evolutionary processes largely dominate cross-border tourism path development literature and explores the potential role of spatial imaginaries in shaping these paths through a proposed path formation framework. Section three outlines the methods and explains the unique case selection, while section four presents the findings on the role of spatial imaginaries in the emergence of cross-border tourism paths, focusing on the KAZA case. The final sections discuss the implications of the findings and conclude the study.

6.2 Transboundary Regions as Spaces for Cross-Border Tourism Emergence

Transboundary Conservation Areas (TBCAs), such as the KAZA region in Southern Africa, are increasingly recognised as tools for achieving biodiversity conservation and socio-economic development. Although their origins can be traced back to the 1930s (Thorsell, 1988), their prominence in Africa has significantly grown over the past 25 years. According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), TBCAs enhance ecological integrity, support the survival of migratory species, and provide socio-cultural and economic benefits (Vasilijević et al., 2015). Two key features make TBCAs particularly important for tourism development: they span across two or more national borders, often in remote regions, and they host diverse biodiversity, cultural, and striking landscapes. These characteristics make TBCAs ideal for fostering cross-border tourism, which can drive socio-economic growth for the communities in and around these areas. Some scholars (Chaderopa, 2013) observe that tourism often flourishes in remote and less-developed areas, unlike other economic activities that gravitate toward larger urban agglomerations. Von Bonveter (1969, p. 188) describes this trend as a movement "away from the familiar scene to the distant places," while Christaller (1963, p. 95) highlights tourism's preference for "the periphery of settlement districts," seeking locations such as "the highest mountain, the loneliest woods, [or] the remotest beaches." This inclination makes transboundary areas especially appealing for tourism development.

In modern tourism, it is common for foreigners to visit urban centres, but peripheral locations often remain the focus of interest. Peripherality has been a key selling point for African tourism, shaped by colonial governments and tourism agents who marketed the continent as "Wild and Untamed." Campaign slogans like "*Africa: There's nowhere like it on the planet for wildlife, wild lands, and rich traditions that endure. Prepare to fall in love*" (Lonely Planet, 2017) or "*There's an adventure waiting for you on the continent of Africa!*" have reinforced this image. Over the decades, millions of tourists have been drawn to Africa, seeking an "untouched Garden of Eden" (Lekan, 2011, p. 225) or a wild and untamed destination (Cleveland, 2021). While decolonial scholars critique these narratives as offensive, they highlight the enduring role of peripherality as a driving force in African tourism (Bollig, 2020). TBCAs reshape and reimagine space at a supra-national level, facilitating the free movement of tourists across borders and creating transfrontier destinations (Noe, 2015; Delaney & Leitner, 1997; Rangan & Kull, 2009). These areas support the rise of neoliberal initiatives for tourism led by various stakeholders (Büscher & Fletcher, 2014; Duffy, 2013). Lastly, the Southern African

Development Community (SADC) development frameworks regard TBCAs as a strategic approach to attracting premier investments in tourism destinations (SADC, 2012). Therefore, the potential for cross-border tourism in TBCAs is evident, but the missing link lies in the processes required for their successful establishment and growth.

6.3 Path development in tourism Destinations: EEG and Agency Approaches

The emergence of industrial paths, such as tourism destinations, has become a point of convergence between tourism and economic geography studies, reflecting ongoing calls to strengthen the conceptual links between these two fields (Ioannides, 1995; Mitchell & Murphy, 1990). Perhaps one of the most cited concepts on tourism destination development has been the Tourism Area Life Cycle model (TALC) developed by Richard Butler (Butler, 1980). It builds on a three-stage model (discovery, growth and expansion) of destination evolution, which was developed by Gilbert (1939) and Christaller (1963). It suggests that the life cycle of a tourist area can be divided into several stages: exploration, involvement, development, consolidation, stagnation, and then a range of outcomes, from rejuvenation to decline. This model has faced criticism (Ma & Hassink, 2013) mainly on its applicability and theorisation (See, for example, Hovinen, 2001; Getz, 1991; Martin & Uysal, 1990), prompting a review by Butler (2006a, 2006b). In response to these critiques, tourism and geography scholars have adopted concepts from evolutionary economic geography (EEG) to better understand destination development (e.g., Brouder & Eriksson, 2013; Ioannides et al., 2014; James et al., 2023; Ma & Hassink, 2013). EEG posits that regional industrial change results from "contingent, yet path-dependent, historical processes" (Boschma & Frenken, 2011; Martin & Sunley, 2006). It suggests that industrial paths develop through branching processes, where firms and industries diversify into technologically related sectors. These branching processes are considered essential mechanisms for path creation (Steen, 2016, p. 1608). Furthermore, regional industrial development is seen as endogenous, shaped by the region's past economic trajectories (Martin & Sunley, 2006). Alongside these dominant paradigms, many other conceptualisations have appeared (See, for example, Brouder et al., 2017, for a comprehensive evaluation).

EEG has faced criticism within economic geography for its overly firm-centric approach that ignores the role of non-firm actors, institutions and public policy (Hassink et al., 2014), as well as its neglect of the role of extra-regional influences in path development (Asheim et al., 2013).

Other alternative bridging concepts have emerged, emphasising the role of agency in path development (Grillitsch & Sotarauta, 2020; Baekkelund, 2021; Isaksen et al., 2019; Benner, 2023). Tourism studies appear to be again drawing on these concepts (agency) to explain destination development (e.g., Benner, 2022; Clivaz et al., 2014; Mlilo et al., 2024). Numerous other conceptualisations have broadened our understanding of how paths emerge in regions, emphasising the role of non-firm actors (Dawley et al., 2015) and extra-regional resources (Isaksen & Tripple, 2017). One of the key concepts on path development that addresses the concerns discussed above is the path formation framework proposed by Binz et al. (2015). Binz et al. (2015) understand path development as influenced by processes that are not only conditioned by preexisting regional capabilities and technological relatedness but also by the way firm and non-firm actors mobilise and anchor key resources for industry formation.

They argue that “...new paths emerge not from external shocks but from the strategic agency in heterogeneous actor groups that jointly act upon locked-in structures and mobilise resources to create a new industry” (Binz et al., 2015, p. 177). They propose four key resources for path formation: knowledge, markets, financial investment, and legitimacy. Akin to EEG literature, they view *knowledge* as an essential driver of new path development. Knowledge is perceived broadly as containing both tacit and explicit dimensions and an experience-based know-how and network-based know-who. *Financial investment* is crucial since high-risk new economic activities often struggle to mobilise financial inputs. In this regard, actors mobilise and allocate financial inputs, such as bank loans or angel investors. *Legitimation* can be achieved by adapting the path to the existing institutional structure or vice versa. The mobilisation of legitimacy makes the products and industry desirable to their context, given the scepticism that often accompanies new paths (Breul et al., 2021). In new paths, *markets* often do not exist and often have to be created by the actors themselves. A new industrial path will face serious challenges if even one of the resources is missing. The growth of these resources depends on how different players, networks, and institutions work together. Success happens when these resources are well-coordinated and aligned (Binz et al., 2015).

6.4 Towards a conceptual framework on future imaginaries in cross-border tourism emergence

TBCAs and the emergent CBT paths are shaped by long-term visions, narratives and imaginaries about places largely influenced by international and local NGOs, Governments

and other actors. We see them as imaginaries strategically mobilised to advance conservation, tourism and geopolitical interests. Imaginaries are deeply intertwined and play a significant role in tourism (Benner, 2021; Salazar, 2012). To contextualise, we draw on the seminal work of Jessop (2004, 2012), who defines an imaginary as “a semiotic ensemble (or meaning system) that frames individual subjects’ lived experience of an inordinately complex world and/or guides collective calculation about that world... imaginaries are an important semiotic moment of the network of social practices in a given social field, institutional order, or wider social formation” (p. 8). Therefore, they influence behaviour and become embedded in social practices (Benner, 2021; Salazar, 2012). As a result, they can acquire causative power, which justifies their analysis in destination development processes. Given the fluidity of this concept and its varied interpretations across disciplines, it is essential to clarify that, in this context, we specifically refer to spatial imaginaries. These focus on “stories and ways of talking about places and spaces that transcend language as embodied performances by people in the material world” (Watkins, 2015, p. 509).

If imaginaries are causative and can motivate, influence or constitute the actions of human agency, which is interwoven with the discourses, practices, and materialities of the present, how can it be studied? The answer is not simple, given that “ontologically, the future does not yet exist, except in the form of its images” (Gong, 2024). An image of the future is “an expectation about the state of things to come at some future time. Collectively held images of how the future will unfold are critical because they free economic actors from paralysing doubt, enabling them to commit resources and coordinate decisions even if those expectations prove inaccurate (Beckert, 2016). To study the role of imaginaries in shaping the future, Gong (2024) suggests a plausible approach: tracing the historical dynamics of how people’s perceptions of a place’s future have evolved. This approach allows one to explore how these shifting perceptions influence the adoption of certain technologies, the emergence of specific industries, related diversification processes, and regional development. By adopting this approach, scholars can better examine the causal power of imaginaries while accounting for both contingencies and broader mechanisms.

Empirically, we applied qualitative research methods in economic geography, particularly path tracing, to examine the lifecycle and evolution of a spatial imaginary in a transboundary area where animals move freely and cross-border tourism flourishes. Additionally, we used qualitative techniques specifically suited for studying spatial imaginaries, including discourse analysis and reviewing media presentations and images. This process examines how such

imaginaries are formed and sustained through agency that mobilises key resources—knowledge, markets, financial investment, and legitimacy (Binz et al., 2015). It elucidates and deconstructs imaginaries to explore how they are translated and who holds the power to shape them (Weiser et al., 2014). This exploration also involves assessing how existing structural conditions shape the "opportunity spaces" that enable or constrain human agency in realising these imaginaries. According to Grillitsch and Sotarauta (2020), opportunity spaces mediate the interaction between agency and structure. These opportunity spaces represent what is possible for entrepreneurs within specific regional, industry, and temporal contexts shaped by place-based or institutional actors. By analysing these dynamics, one can gain a deeper understanding of the conditions that enable or constrain the realisation of spatial imaginaries in transboundary contexts. This approach is imaginative: it begins with an envisioned outcome. It works backwards to identify the factors and processes that must have led to its realisation. This method involves carefully weaving together the in-depth experiences of various actors across the transboundary region, creating a rich narrative that explains how the imagined outcome came to be. Figure 13 below illustrates our conceptual framework. We conceptualise cross-border tourism development as progressing through three stages: *emergence*, *takeoff* and *consolidation*. At each stage, specific opportunity spaces and contextual conditions influence the evolution of the Cross-Border Tourism Area (CBTA). Within this framework, actors mobilise four key types of resources—*knowledge*, *markets*, *financial investment*, and *legitimacy*—aligned with a specific spatial imaginary to drive progress.

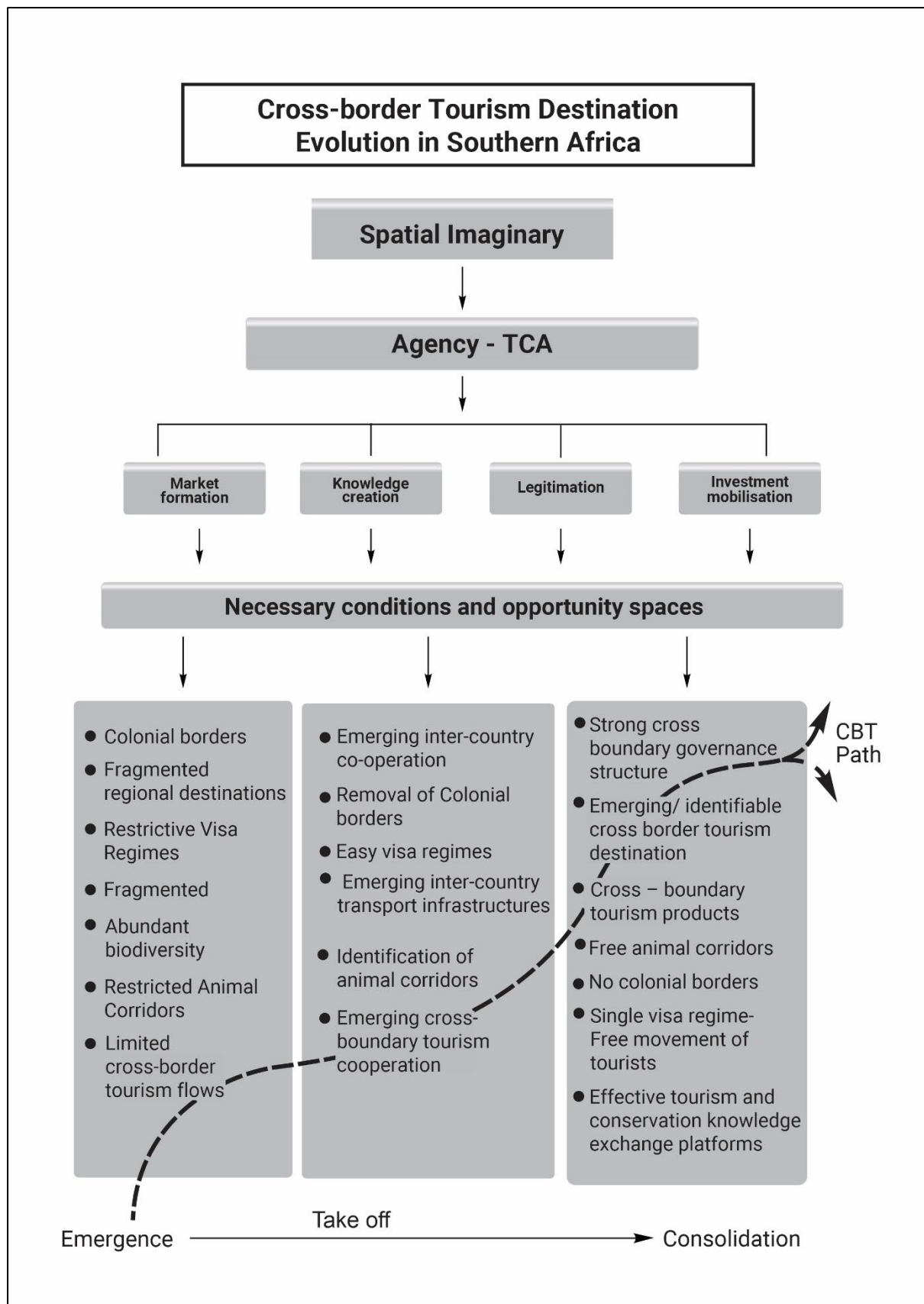


Figure 13: Conceptual Framework: Cross-Border Tourism Destination Development

6.5 Methods and Case Selection

Our research examines how agents have mobilised future-oriented imaginaries, visions and narratives to create a cross-border tourism destination, with careful attention to assigning causation by retrospectively analysing changes while minimising ex-post bias. Several scholars (Watkins, 2015; Benner, 2024) offer guidance on ensuring methodological rigour in such studies. We adopted a mixed-methods approach anchored in a qualitative path-tracing and qualitative methods suited for studying spatial imaginaries. This approach enabled us to identify and explain the causal mechanisms linking events, agency, and structural factors (Sotarauta & Grillitsch, 2023) while tracking the construction and dissemination of imaginaries through what Gong (2024) calls imaginative research approaches. Based on an extensive review of literature, we can show how we approached our study (for example, Gregory, 1994; Kothari & Wilkinson, 2010; Said, 2003; Preininger, 2024; Sotarauta & Grillitsch, 2023; Watkins, 2015; Weisser, 2014). The table below shows the different approaches.

Table 6: Research approaches -Qualitative path tracing and imaginaries

	Qualitative Path tracing (Economic Geography)	Qualitative approaches for research in imaginaries (Discourse analysis, Image and Media Review)
Objective	Tracks emergence and evolution of economic and spatial processes over time	Concerned with how imaginaries are constructed, communicated, and interpreted
Focus	Influenced by critical realism, focus on actors' experiences, observations, and measurements ('empirical') to identify the relevant events ('actual') and the mechanisms generating them ('empirical')	social constructivism and interpretivism. Focus on symbols, narratives, and representations shaping perceptions of space.
Data sources	Mixed methods (quantitative and qualitative evidence) -Interviews,	Media presentations, images, public discourse, other quasi-

	economic reports, policy documents.	scientific documentaries, and magazines
Analysis	Process tracing, evolutionary/historical reconstruction-	Thematic coding, critical discourse analysis, semiotic analysis
Key questions	Seeks to understand why and how paths evolve and actors' role in directing them	How and who creates spatial imaginaries and how do they shape perceptions of space? How are they circulated?
Outcomes	Identifies economic and institutional paths that shape regions	Shows how imaginaries influence actors' perceptions, policies, and identity formation

Case Selection

The KAZA TFCA offers a compelling case study on the influence of spatial imaginaries and future visions in shaping development paths. Our case selection, based on “theoretical Sampling” (Siggelkow, 2007), can, therefore, offer an opportunity to shed more light on our theoretical interests (Mörner & Binz, 2021, p. 179). The idea of creating this transboundary conservation area emerged around 2000 and was officially established in 2011 by five countries—Zimbabwe, Botswana, Namibia, Angola, and Zambia. It involves diverse actors across various governmental levels, including local stakeholders like tourism operators and city officials, national governments, regional bodies like the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and international partners, all working towards a shared vision. KAZA is the largest conservation area in the world by landmass, covering over 200,387 square miles with an estimated population of over 2.7 million people. With a long-term goal of becoming a premier cross-border tourism destination, enough time has passed since its inception to reflect on its conceptualisation, legitimisation, and evolution over the last two decades.

Sampling, Data Collection and Analysis

This research is based on extensive fieldwork conducted across four countries within the KAZA—Botswana, Namibia, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Over two phases, we carried out 63 key

informant interviews, four focus group discussions, and a documentary analysis. Angola was excluded from our primary research due to the underdeveloped state of its tourism and conservation sectors and its history of conflict, which raised security concerns for our team. However, most of the information on Angola came from international organisations planning future activities in the country, as government institutions supporting tourism and conservation remain weak (Conservation International, 2021).

The first data collection phase focused on understanding how KAZA as a spatial imaginary was conceptualised, legitimised, and circulated, and the progress made so far, toward establishing a cross-border tourism destination. We examined the roles of various actors at multiple levels and stages, conducting an in-depth documentary analysis of reports, maps, magazines, travel guides from the KAZA Secretariat, member states, and international NGOs, as well as the KAZA Treaty and historical newspaper articles. We also conducted 42 key informant interviews and held four focus group discussions between January and March 2024 with leaders from the private and public sectors. We paid particular attention to images and discourses that people use, presented various information tools to our participants to understand how imaginaries are constructed, interpreted, circulated, and how these inform multiple decisions taken by actors.

In addition, data on tourist movements were collected from immigration departments in the four countries. The second phase of research, conducted between July and August 2024, sought to construct a timeline of events based on recollections of actors as well as through available data, paying particular attention to understanding which actors played what role, the impact of these actions, and the type of resources mobilised. We conducted 21 key informant interviews with private sector stakeholders, city officials, and representatives from non-governmental organisations. After each interview, we produced transcripts and a field note report for each phase. A structured narrative analysis approach allowed us to “specify structures, institutions and actors in each change process, identify the opportunities and constraints, and thus create explanations linking the causal powers of agency and structures to processes under scrutiny” (Sotarauta & Grillitsch, 2023, p. 95). A balanced focus group discussion in each country triangulated all information from key informant interviews.

6.6 Empirical illustration: The Kavango Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area

KAZA offers a valuable case study for understanding the evolution of cross-border tourist destinations. This case highlights the conditions and mechanisms that enable the emergence of cross-border tourism in such destinations. Furthermore, using our analytical framework, we can examine how key actors coordinate efforts and mobilise critical resources to achieve their shared goals.

Emergence: 2000-2010

Our framework shows that actors face a fragmented regional destination at the emergence stage, with each subregion (country) developing its separate tourism product. The region is also faced with restrictive visa regimes hampering the easy movement of people (tourists), “hard” (DeBardeleben, 2017), colonial borders or arbitrarily drawn political boundaries (Hanks, 2000) that impede the free movement of both people and animals. Thus, there are fragmented ecosystems, ultimately leading to biodiversity loss (SADC, 2005, p.38). At this stage, there are little or no institutional arrangements allowing for the cross-border coordination of the tourism path. Actors also face abundant opportunity spaces from abundant wildlife and historical animal corridors. In the case of the KAZA region, these opportunities consist of two major river basins that create a congregation ground of world-class populations of wildlife and globally significant wetlands, three UNESCO World Heritage Sites, 36 national parks and rich biodiversity, including over 250,000 elephants and numerous plant and bird species. The Okavango Delta, the largest inland delta globally and the Victoria Falls add to KAZA’s allure, positioning it as a highly coveted safari destination with immense potential for the tourism industry (Mlilo et al., 2024). These opportunity spaces form the basis for international cooperation for optimal management. (Zbicz, 1999)

Firstly, based on conversations with government representatives, NGOs, conservation activists, tourism enterprise owners, and a review of grey literature, we could track how KAZA's spatial imaginary was constructed and circulated. The transboundary conservation areas in Southern Africa emerged from a political economy context in which there was growing scholarly interest, particularly around 1990-2000, in promoting community-based natural resource management (CBNRM), which responded to post-colonial concerns for democratised and decentralised ownership of natural resources. As one of our key informants remarked, “in Zimbabwe, a land reform program was building up while in Namibia, CBNRM had been

legalised as demands for land ownership equity increased”. As Buscher (2013, p.9) observed, CBNRM thus became the “political umbrella under which these demands have been articulated most forcefully”. There were several well-founded natural resource management programmes (NRMP) in the region with ample funding from USAID; when Apartheid was there, USAID was looking for projects which were not too politicised and anti-South Africa; conservation then was a good candidate; the 1990s also saw the build-up of powerful and well-financed NGOs (Bollig, 2020). Secondly, the same period experienced a reorientation of global neoliberalism, reconstituting conservation as a tool for the expansion of capital, thus changing its ideals, practices and representations to fit the post-colonial context and to position itself as a solution or grand saviour to environmental concerns (Butscher, 2010, 2013; Igoe et al., 2010). The formation of Peace Parks Foundation (PPF) in 1997 thus emerged out of this context, supported by a grant of USD 260,000 from Anton Rupert of the World-Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), but more importantly, with direct endorsement by Nelson Mandela to become the pioneer of Peace Parks or TFCAs as they are known in Southern Africa (Ramutsindela, 2007).

Given the context outlined above, the next issue is how various actors construct and circulate this spatial imaginary to achieve their objectives and the mechanisms they use. The first critical resource mobilised is *legitimacy* because, for projects to emerge, they need to be accepted by key stakeholders. KAZA was framed as a "win-win" solution for conservation. It was envisioned as addressing long-standing demands for land and dismantling colonial borders while tackling growing concerns about biodiversity loss (WWF, 2012). Buscher (2013) highlights that the rallying call for KAZA mirrored the notion of “selling nature to save it” (MacAfee, 1999). Because KAZA was presented as a mutually beneficial initiative, its establishment was seen as not optional but necessary—a competitive land-use option that gained prominence on the political agenda by addressing or concealing earlier conflicts between capital interests and communal land ownership. We noticed that actors in the NGO sector presented a problem (biodiversity loss) and then made themselves indispensable to the situation by claiming to be able to provide a solution by creating particular labels, “Conservation frontiers, Peace Parks – a Global Solution, An Africa without fences”, for example (Weisser, 2014)

Many interviewees emphasised the role of non-state actors, such as donors and NGOs, led by organisations like the PPF, WWF, and the World Bank, in actively engaging the state as a legitimising force for KAZA's creation. This process was notably influenced by South African nature organisations, particularly WWF, which held meetings with then-President Nelson

Mandela and Joachim Chissano of Mozambique in 1990 and 1996. These discussions laid the groundwork for several southern African countries to adopt Transfrontier Conservation Areas (TFCAs) (De Villers, 1999). To align the cross-border path, the actors extended their influence to the Southern African Development Community (SADC), which began developing legislative frameworks⁷ and guidelines to facilitate the establishment of TFCAs, including KAZA. In essence, these NGOs had managed to build an alliance with SADC and its governments, ensuring a key translation tactic of an imaginary to be accepted within key government spaces. For KAZA specifically, national technical committees were established in each participating country to guide a coordinated TFCA-integrated development planning process. These committees extensively consulted with communities, NGOs, and other stakeholders to enhance the initiative's acceptability and legitimacy (PPF, 2009).

The second resource is *knowledge creation*. KAZA relied on expert knowledge of external actors, particularly from NGOs that led the initial conceptual discussions that began in early 1993, notably the Peace Park Foundation (PPF). PPF undertook two feasibility studies, supported the consultation process, and provided the technical backstop to formalise KAZA. PPF benefited from existing knowledge and expertise from organisations like the World Bank and IUCN, which had long been promoting Peace Parks globally (Hamilton et al., 1996; Thorsell, 1990). Another critical pillar was the African Wildlife Foundation (AWF), which promoted the Four Corners Transboundary Natural Resource Management Area, which the United States government supported through USAID. The sub-grant to AWF was geared towards a series of technical reviews, which provided critical knowledge on priority conservation issues and the value of the transboundary approach. The reviews provided the critical knowledge resources for the emergence of KAZA (Timberlake & Childes, 2004). Major *Investment mobilisation* for transboundary conservation and tourism included initiatives that mobilised extra-regional resources, mainly from multilateral institutions. The first significant initiative was the Okavango Upper Zambezi International Tourism Development Initiative (OUZIT) spatial development initiative launched at the World Summit in Johannesburg in 2002, which was aimed at stimulating a regional tourism and resource development zone by attracting major investments in infrastructure and eco-tourism initiatives through the Regional Tourism Organisation of Southern Africa (RETOSA). The project sought

⁷ Among a plethora of legislation, the key ones for transboundary conservation are the SADC Protocol on Wildlife Conservation and Law Enforcement (1999), SADC Protocol on Tourism (2009, 2019 Amended), SADC Protocol on Forestry (2002), SADC Regional Biodiversity Strategy (2000, 6) SADC Protocol on Wildlife Conservation and Law Enforcement (1999), SADC Protocol on Shared Water Courses (2002)

to mobilise USD 230 million to upgrade infrastructure in the parks and another USD 250 million for eco-tourism facilities, which later evolved into KAZA (SADC, 2003). At this stage, much of the funding was for knowledge generation, institutionalisation and exploratory processes.

Takeoff: 2011-2020

During the takeoff phase, a shared spatial vision is established among cooperating partners. This phase sees the early development of inter-country cooperation, with new visa policies that ease colonial-era or rigid border restrictions. Wildlife corridors are identified and protected, while a cross-border tourism route begins to take shape, driven by private sector collaboration. In this phase, we observed early attempts by alliances between NGOs and governments to frame KAZA from being primarily a conservation imaginary to a broader vision that increasingly emphasised tourism to show how communities would benefit from large-scale conservation. The imaginary of "Tourism without Borders" gained traction, motivating actors to recognise and pursue tourism opportunities. This shift was reflected in creating various strategic documents, pamphlets, and online content, which played a key role in translating and reinforcing this evolving imaginary. In response to the above imaginary two resources immediately mobilised, that is, *legitimacy and knowledge* from extra-regional sources as key resources for early path formation; the governments of Angola, Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, and Zambia signed a memorandum of agreement in December 2006, which carried over from the emergence phase. The countries collectively agreed that the vision of KAZA, as articulated in its treaty signed on 18 August 2011, would be "To establish a world-class transfrontier conservation and tourism destination area in the Okavango and Zambezi River Basin regions of Angola, Botswana, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe within the context of sustainable development." (KAZA, 2019). Institutionalisation (*legitimacy mobilisation*) of the path continued in this phase with the formulation of Integrated Development Plans (IDPs) for the national components, which involved in-country cross-sectoral consultations, priority projects and the development of the Master Integrated Development Plan for the entire KAZA, focusing on six Wildlife Dispersal Areas.

Thirdly, *key investment* at this stage was mobilised internationally from KWF, a German funding bank that provided Euro 430,000 seed support to KAZA, followed by a 12 million grant. KFW has been a major supporter and has granted a further 15 million Euros towards KAZA. In total, KWF committed about 49 million euros by 2013. The five governments have

also committed to providing USD 60,000 in annual grants to KAZA. This extensive financial investment was critical to allow the path to take off.

The fourth resource mobilised at the takeoff stage is market formation, which was not apparent in the first phase. The cross-border tourism market begins to take off by implementing various SADC-wide protocols, the KAZA treaty, national laws, and the signing of the hosting agreement for the KAZA Secretariat stationed in Botswana. This resource mobilisation responded and consolidated the imaginary of “Tourism without borders”. Most importantly, the following strategies and projects are rolled out:

- KAZA-aligned protected area planning
- Aligned transboundary planning
- Conservation strategies for specific areas
- The African Wild Dog Strategy
- The Carnivore Conservation Strategy
- The Lion Conservation Strategy
- Buffalo and elephant tracking to support long-range movements
- TFCA Business Strategy and product

These strategies solidify the idea and strengthen the imaginary of a transboundary area, which provides the basis for cross-border activities by business actors. KAZA has also supported the construction and distribution of critical infrastructure, particularly for regional national parks, to support the above strategies. We found strong evidence that animals move across boundaries from Botswana to Angola as a result of these investments (see Figure 16 below). On 28 November 2014, KAZA launched the UNIVISA pilot project, which Zimbabwe and Zambia adopted by December 2016 to allow tourists to obtain one visa for USD 50 to visit the two countries multiple times for 30 days. It also covers day trips to Botswana through the Kazungula border. In 2019, KAZA also launched the KAZA brand guideline through its tourism working group to support cross-border market formation. The results of resource mobilisation of legitimacy, knowledge, investment, and, more crucially, market formation at

this stage can be seen in information box 1, which shows that the cross-border path is at the takeoff stage.

Table 7: Information box 1

Evidence of Cross-Border Tourism Emergence
- 60 Heritage Sites mapped across KAZA - Multiple- Joint Ventures with private sector involvement (for example, in the Zambezi region of Namibia, we encountered at least 20 - Shared large-scale infrastructure- For example, in May 2021, the 923m long Kazungula Bridge to connect Zimbabwe, Botswana, Namibia and Zambia was financed through a USD 260 million co-funding from the African Development Bank, Botswana and Zambia - 110 Community-based organisations formed across KAZA to support eco and rural tourism - SADC Law enforcement strategy - KAZA CUP Golf Classic (36 holes) now held across three countries of KAZA (Zambia, Zimbabwe and Botswana) since 2019 - Emerging Transboundary Tours – e.g., Wigwan Nature Expeditionen – Targets German Market - Activities along international boundaries – e.g., Zambezi –Chobe boat cruises – involving 3 States - Helicopter rides – These use shared Air space within the KAZA - Great KAZA birding Route – funded by KFW through Birdlife International and promotes Avitourism across the five countries. - Independent private sector cross-border initiatives- e.g. Africa’s Eden, with over 400 members

Figure 14 illustrates tourist movements across the KAZA region, highlighting a high concentration of travel between Victoria Falls, Chobe, and Livingstone, primarily through the Livingstone and Kazungula border posts. Victoria Falls is the central tourism hub and a key distribution point. Angola and Namibia remain outside the UNIVISA system, limiting their integration with the other three countries. Tourist visits to Namibia via the Ngoma and Katima Mulilo border posts are notably low, reflecting the relative isolation of the Zambezi region. Livingstone Airport functions as a major entry point, with many tourists crossing into Victoria Falls without significantly engaging with Livingstone’s tourism offerings. Our analysis indicates the strongest tourism link between Victoria Falls and Chobe exists.

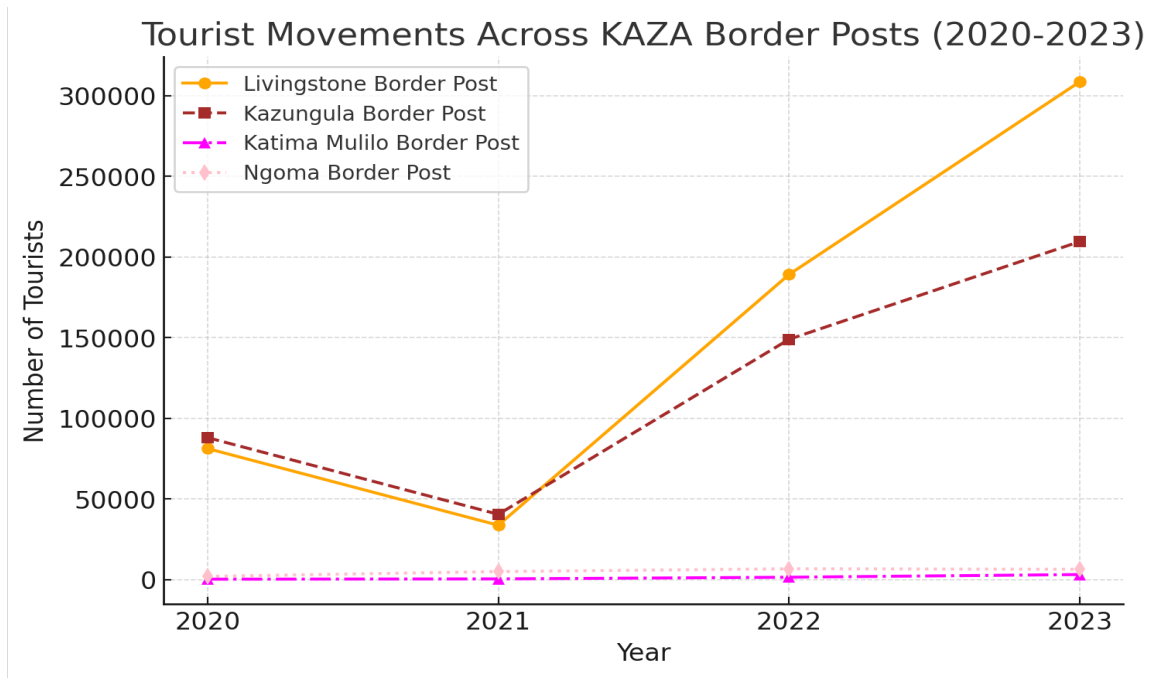


Figure 14: Tourist Movements in the KAZA

Source: Author's own computations

We also looked at animal movements in the KAZA, focusing on elephants. Based on KAZA surveys, at least 220,000 elephants move freely across the transboundary region, particularly where borderline fences have been removed. Figure 15 below shows a heat map of elephant movements based on an aerial survey by KAZA (Naidoo et al., 2024). These movements restate the need for KAZA-wide campaigns as the wildlife populations are spread across the TFCA despite fragmented tourist movements. More importantly, it restates our argument that animals (elephants) move more freely than people, given the emphasis that KAZA has placed on conservation rather than tourism.

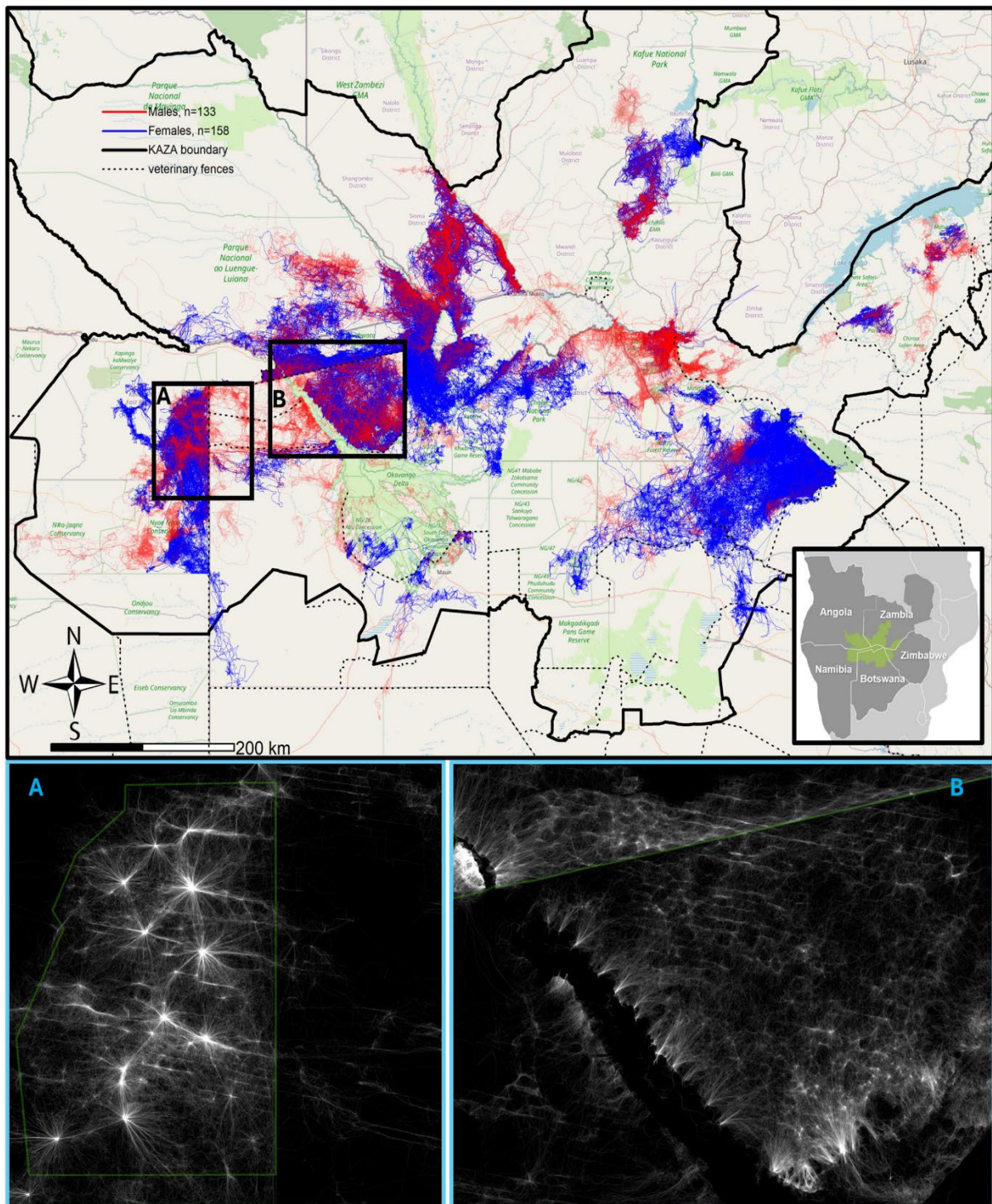


Figure 15: GPS sampling of African elephants in the KAZA.

GPS sampling of African elephants in the KAZA. Upper panel: Location of elephant movement trajectories used in the analyses ($n = 133$ males, red lines; $n = 158$ females, blue lines. Background from Open Street Map: The green polygon on the inset locator map shows the location of KAZA in southern Africa. Veterinary fences are shown in dashed black lines. Lower panels: Brighter colours indicate a greater degree of overlap of GPS-derived movement

trajectories. (A) Artificial waterpoint use in Khaudum National Park, Namibia. (B) Micro-corridor use (arrow-like features to the west and south), Okavango Panhandle, Botswana.

Source: Naidoo et al. (2024) (Heat map as per CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

Figure 16 illustrates tourist visits to national parks within the KAZA region during 2019 and 2020. Once again, Victoria Falls (Rainforest and Zambezi National Parks) and Chobe (*Chobe National Park*) account for a significant share of these visits. There is a strong connection between Zimbabwe and Botswana, primarily driven by Chobe day trips, which attract tourists due to the park's abundant wildlife. All the tourism operators we interviewed confirmed that they take visitors on day trips to Chobe because of the high likelihood of spotting the Big Five—lion, elephant, buffalo, leopard, and rhinoceros. For example, two major tourism businesses in Victoria Falls, Wild Horizons and Shearwater, estimate that at least 85% of their guests prefer game viewing in Botswana, while only 15% choose to visit Livingstone (*Mosi-oa-Tunya National Park*), which has been dramatically affected by negative sentiments around animal poaching. The three national parks in the Zambezi (Namibia), Nkasa Rupara, Mudumu and Bwabwata, show promise but are heavily isolated.

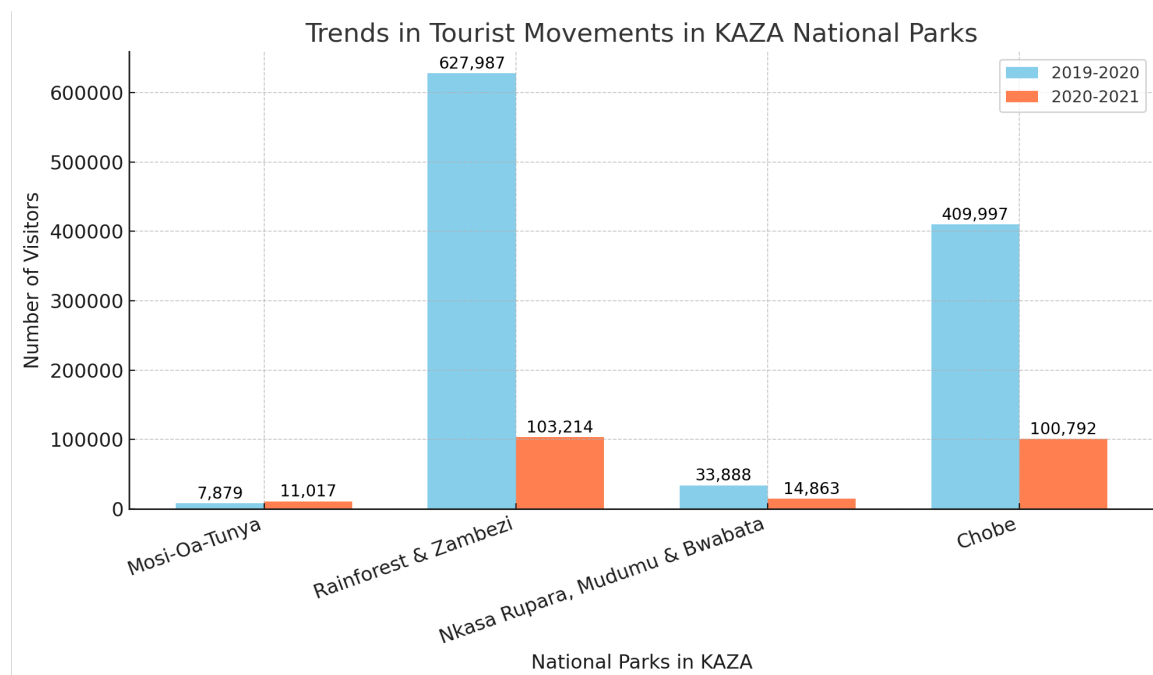


Figure 16: Tourist movements in KAZA national parks

Source: Author's own computations

Consolidation: 2020-

The key feature of this stage is consolidation, where the region functions as a unified and viable tourism destination. This stage is characterised by well-established cross-border business and governance structures, leading to complex business relationships and knowledge exchanges. As a result, cross-border tourism activities become more visible and sustainable. At this stage, colonial-era or rigid borders are removed, and a single-destination visa is in place, facilitating seamless travel. At this stage, we expect robust partnerships between the private sector, community organisations, and government that support strong conservation and knowledge exchange platforms. The imaginary of “tourism without borders” continued, although the emphasis here was on an image of a “Single Premium Destination”. The “Rivers of Life” cross-border tourism strategy aimed to mobilise this imaginary.

Our assessment indicates that KAZA remains in the takeoff phase and struggles to reach complete consolidation as a unified tourism destination. We identified several key challenges contributing to this stagnation through focus group discussions. The primary issue is KAZA's strong emphasis on conservation programs, often at the expense of cross-border tourism development. While some cross-border tourism initiatives exist, they are limited and concentrated mainly in Zimbabwe, Botswana, and Zambia, leaving Angola and Namibia with minimal participation. Additionally, most KAZA funding is directed toward conservation rather than promoting cross-border tourism, making establishing a single, cohesive destination difficult. Another major challenge is the lack of private-sector cooperation across borders. Each country continues to market its individual destinations rather than KAZA. Even on international platforms, a TFCA-wide marketing program has only been established in the past three years. The latest state of the KAZA report confirms these observations, noting, “business development opportunities within KAZA (including tourism) remain largely untapped despite ample and primarily intact natural and cultural assets... “(KAZA, 2019, p. 67). This affects developing a viable cross-border innovation system supported by robust knowledge transfers (Makkonen & Williams, 2024).

The uneven development of tourism offerings across KAZA hinders efforts to establish a unified tourism product. Studies by Mlilo et al. (2024) highlight this disparity, noting that Victoria Falls offers over 53 registered activities alone, whereas the Zambezi region has only six. Africa's Eden, a private sector initiative to market the KAZA region, has held region-wide travel and destination marketing trade shows in Victoria Falls and Chobe but consistently

ignores the Zambezi, which further isolates the region and hinders network-based learning opportunities. Despite its rich biodiversity and tourist attractions, Angola's portion of KAZA remains isolated mainly due to lingering security concerns stemming from the 27-year civil war that ended in 2002. The KAZA Secretariat and various reports (KAZA, 2019) acknowledge this as a significant challenge. As a result, while individual countries offer a variety of tourism activities, only five can be considered genuinely cross-border: birdwatching, golf tournaments, game drives, boat cruises, and helicopter rides. This limited selection is insufficient to support a thriving cross-border tourism industry.

Furthermore, the KAZA UNIVISA, introduced a decade ago (2014) to facilitate seamless travel within the region, is still not functioning as intended. While it operates relatively well between Zimbabwe and Zambia, its validity expires after 24 hours when entering Botswana. During our fieldwork in March 2023, the visa had yet to be implemented in Namibia and Angola, further limiting its effectiveness in promoting regional tourism integration. Significant institutional differences at the borders of the four countries we visited further complicate cross-border tourism planning. For instance, the Zimbabwe-Zambia border closes at 10 PM, the Zimbabwe-Botswana border at 8 PM, and the Botswana-Namibia border as early as 6 PM. These varying closing times make it challenging to coordinate cross-border activities efficiently. Additionally, entry procedures and fees differ across borders. Our interviews show that tour operators travelling from Victoria Falls to Livingstone encounter lengthy and time-consuming procedures, whereas crossing into Botswana and Namibia is relatively smoother. The route from Livingstone to Zambezi appears straightforward, but poor road infrastructure between the destinations forces tourists to travel through Botswana. As a result, they must cross two borders, making cross-border tours more complex and inconvenient. The visa process is even more complex for travellers on the Namibia-Angola route, further restricting seamless movement. Infrastructure at the border posts also varies significantly, with some crossings lacking adequate facilities. This disparity discourages cross-border travel and hinders efforts to develop a genuinely integrated tourism destination within KAZA, which Asheim et al. (2019, p.94-100) characterise as infrastructural and institutional failures.

6.7 Discussion: The Challenge of building a cross-border destination!

Our case study provides an important heuristic tool for how cross-border tourist destinations evolve within transboundary conservation areas in sub-Saharan Africa. We identify the

preconditions actors must navigate and the critical resources required at each stage of this evolution. Drawing on the Tourism Area Life Cycle model (Butler, 2024), we outline three phases: emergence, takeoff and consolidation. In the emergence phase, non-state actors particularly conservation NGOs (e.g., PPF, WWF) and private sector stakeholders construct a powerful utopian vision of a seamless ecological landscape where wildlife and tourists move freely across borders. However, this vision is not purely altruistic. “They are driven by the convergence of networks of interests, which work to resolve the apparent contradictions between demands for continued economic growth and growing concerns about what it portends for the future of our planet” (Igoe et al., 2010, p. 486). Scholars have debated the self-interest of these actors, particularly given the lucrative nature of tourism enterprises in conservation areas (Butscher, 2010, 2013).

In the emergence phase, we observe actors developing various imaginaries aligning with the vision of KAZA, for example, “Conservation frontiers, Peace Parks, a Global Solution, An Africa without fences”. To advance these imaginaries, actors mobilise legitimacy, knowledge, and financial investment as essential resources. Legitimacy is achieved by aligning conservation narratives with capital interests and local communities' needs. Crucially, these actors co-opt the state and extra-regional bodies, such as SADC, to formalise and institutionalise conservation as a tool for economic expansion. As a result, KAZA is framed as an inevitable “win-win” future for the region, where conservation and tourism are positioned as mutually reinforcing drivers of economic growth and ecological sustainability. Weisser et al. (2014) see these strategies of imaginary translation as “problematization” in which actors present a problem and then make themselves indispensable to the situation by claiming to provide a solution. This ensures that the imaginary has wider acceptance and motivates the actions of various stakeholders. In the same phase, we identify the crucial role of external knowledge in supporting the creation of transboundary areas. This case study, therefore, builds on emerging narratives that support the notion that ‘new growth paths are created through multiple actors’ activities (Hassink et al., 2019, p. 3).

In the takeoff phase, where KAZA has overcome emergence preconditions, the imaginary frames the region as space for “Tourism without Borders”, which creates the opportunity spaces. To bring this to life, market formation as a resource becomes crucial as the cross-border destination takes shape. This is supported by strong human agency mobilising financial investment, knowledge, and legitimacy in the respective countries. As our results show, institutional differences and failures, different country priorities, and interactional failures

seem to hamper actors' agency to overcome the preconditions for consolidation. In the emergence phase, the state's co-option was necessary to navigate policy, legal and institutional hurdles to fast-track the adoption of the KAZA. However, states are institutionally thick with bureaucratic red tape, and differing country strategies now seem to hamper progress. We find that while the stated objective of most of the five countries is towards regional integration, our discussions with key government officials suggest that borders seem to have a crucial security and national political significance. One government official remarked, "We are not ready to lose our national security in the name of tourism and conservation ", signalling their unwillingness to do away with colonial borders.

The KAZA framework views five countries as a unified region, but this approach overlooks the inherent differences between these nations that lead to destination fragmentation. These differences are particularly evident in tourism potential and the commitment and roles of their respective governments (Mlilo et al., 2024). Research on Zambezi, Chobe and Victoria Falls has shown the uneven emergence of these three destinations, with Zambezi lagging due to differences in institutional entrepreneurship, which affects the realisation of opportunities (Mlilo et al., 2024). Our research suggests that, based on conversations with key stakeholders, the KAZA imaginary seems to lead to similar expectations and perceptions regarding cross-border business potential in the region. However, as Kurikka et al. (2023, p.1442) argue, regional actors must possess the creativity and intentions to navigate and seize perceived opportunities. There is an expectation that actors can adapt, learn, and combine knowledge in innovative ways and almost in similar ways. Yet, factors such as the entrepreneurial environment and contextual influences significantly shape these actions (Doloreux et al., 2024). In other words, the perceived opportunity spaces created by a shared spatial vision require not only the active agency of local actors to realise but also the support of complementary regional assets built on the existing structure of a region that fosters a conducive entrepreneurial environment. The above may explain why the cross-border path is struggling to take off or is concentrated in some parts of the region where the role of the state or the entrepreneurial environment is more supportive of tourism. This builds on Grillitsch & Sotarauta's (2020, p.715–716) understanding that region-specific characteristics may be supportive, constraining, or neutral with respect to specific opportunities.

6.8 Conclusions

Our paper connects recent conceptualisations on industrial path formation in economic geography with the literature on the evolution of cross-border destinations in tourism studies. We build on Richard Butler's Tourism Area Life Cycle model (Butler, 1980) and the early path formation model by Binz et al. (2015), which frames path creation as a process of resource alignment and anchoring. This integration provides a deeper understanding of how cross-border tourism destinations emerge and evolve within complex institutional and economic landscapes. We therefore conceptualise cross-border tourism development as progressing through three stages: emergence, takeoff and consolidation. At each stage, specific opportunity spaces and contextual conditions must be overcome and thus influence the evolution of the Cross-Border Tourism Area (CBTA). At each stage, actors' actions are framed within particular imaginaries and visions that form the basis of their actions. The imaginaries they mobilise four key resources, knowledge, markets, financial investment, and legitimacy, aligned with a specific spatial image to drive progress. We also show why KAZA has remained trapped in the takeoff phase and why the vision of a unified premium cross-border destination characterised by the "tourism without borders" slogan struggles to take off because of differences in agent capabilities and existing preconditions.

The KAZA TFCA is a prime example of how spatial imaginaries can shape the growth paths of transboundary conservation and tourism. From the foregoing, it is clear that KAZA was reframed and marketed as a unified space for cross-border collaboration and idealised ecological integrity. The consequence of these imaginaries or future visions is how they are imagined "today" influences how investments, policy decisions and governance structures evolve. This is because spatial imaginaries are not just linguistic representations, but also 'performative' in that they shape material practices that mould geographies (Watkins, 2015; Gregory, 2004). Other scholars have noted, "Well-established imaginaries shape regional opportunity spaces, empowering or restraining actors in taking advantage of emerging opportunities (Kurikka et al., 2023; Miörner, 2020). In this way, spatial imaginaries are, therefore, causative and can influence the evolution of paths. Studying how such imaginaries have evolved seems to answer an emerging question about the role of future visions in the evolution of regional paths, particularly the questions asked by Gong (2024, p.295) about "how the future motivates, influences, and constitutes the actions of human agency, which is interwoven with the discourses, practices, and materialities of the "present,". Our paper,

therefore, contributes towards an emerging debate on the role of spatial imaginaries in path development. Beyond EEG, theories of regional branching and relatedness, actors' conceptions of desired futures can constitute the basis of current actions and choices, which ultimately lead to paths such as the one emerging in the KAZA (Garud et al., 2010; Hassink et al., 2019, p.1640)

While we highlight the influence of spatial imaginaries, we emphasise that in transboundary regions, especially in postcolonial contexts like southern Africa, their potential to create pathways is limited by colonial borders that cause fragmentation. These imaginaries aim to transcend these colonial borders, but in doing so, they often overlook significant differences in the structural conditions that shape how actors perceive and respond to opportunities. This has important policy implications for addressing fragmentation. Governments must accelerate regional integration, dismantle colonial borders, and empower local actors by establishing strong knowledge transfer systems across regions to foster shared knowledge networks. Additionally, they need to take a realistic approach to the capacities of different regions in pursuing a tourism-driven future. This calls for further research into alternatives to tourism. We believe a KAZA-wide tourism vision is unsustainable, particularly given the challenges observed in the Zambezi and Livingstone regions.

6.9 References

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7. Synthesis: Lessons and Future Research

This dissertation aimed to investigate the drivers and conditions that shape the emergence and evolution of tourism industrial paths in Southern Africa. Adopting an agency-based approach to path development it addresses three central research questions. First, it asks: What forms and combinations of agency are essential for path creation in a Global South context? Second, it explores: How do actors shape and mobilise future visions or imaginaries to drive the emergence and growth of tourism pathways? Third, in light of Africa's colonial legacy and the ongoing challenges it poses for tourism development, this investigation examines: How do history and colonialism influence value capture and participation in tourism value chains? By engaging with these questions, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the interplay between agency, institutions, and structural conditions in the evolution of tourism development paths. The organisation of the study is as follows: a summary of empirical findings, a conceptual discussion, policy implications, and reflections on directions for future research.

7.1 Summary of Key Findings

7.1.1 The role of Human Agency in Tourism Path Development

The first set of empirical findings explores the role of human agency in shaping tourism destinations in the Global South, with a particular focus on Southern Africa. The study notes that there has been a growing emphasis on an agency-centred perspective in regional industrial restructuring. However, much of this literature mainly consists of case studies from the Global North. The research focused on Zimbabwe, Botswana, and Namibia to understand how agency influences the uneven development of cross-border tourism routes. It first shows that Zimbabwe, Botswana, and Namibia share similar colonial histories, which led to the creation of comparable extractive institutions that limited entrepreneurship among local populations. There are, however, slight differences in institutional evolution in Botswana which explain its particular type of path evolution. As a result, ending the system (decolonisation) that created these institutions was a key turning point. This explains why most African tourism destinations experienced growth in visitor numbers and product diversity after independence. Below, I summarise the findings from each regional case study. The broader implications of these results are discussed in section 5.1.2.

Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe

Of the three case studies, Victoria Falls emerged as the leading destination, with a broad tourism pathway that has developed into a phase of consolidation. It therefore offers an insightful case study to observe the changing role of agency. Tourism in Victoria Falls can be segmented into four phases, each characterised by distinct forms and functions of agency. The first phase, marking the end of colonialism in Zimbabwe in 1980, is a pivotal period (critical juncture) characterised by a combination of innovative entrepreneurship, institutional entrepreneurship, and, importantly, nation-state-level institutional entrepreneurship agency. The key factor is the interaction between the nation-state and local institutional entrepreneurship, along with place-based leadership, in shaping a vibrant tourism path. The role of the state is prominent at the outset and is vital for dismantling extractive and exclusive colonial institutions that impede the exercise of agency. In subsequent phases, place-based leadership develops and becomes increasingly important, highlighting the temporal and contextual challenges involved in fostering agency in structurally weak contexts, such as those in Southern Africa. Although the study concludes that Victoria Falls has entered a consolidation phase in its tourism development, existential risks are increasingly endangering this trajectory. Navigating these challenges requires a joint effort involving multiple forms of agency, with an emphasis on place-based leadership, to reconcile divergent visions for the future of tourism in the region.

Chobe, Botswana

The Chobe region represents the second most dynamic tourism destination among the three cases studied within the KAZA. The evolution of the tourism path in Chobe can be divided into three distinct phases. In the first phase, innovative entrepreneurship played a key role in diversifying tourism products, although institutional change was minimal, with limited impact from institutional entrepreneurship. The state's failure to dismantle colonial lock-ins and extractive institutions resulted in a constrained tourism path, with only a small number of local actors able to participate.

The second phase is characterised by a strong institutional response, driven by emergent place-based leadership. This leadership facilitated significant reforms to colonial-era institutions, enhancing access to land, finance, markets, and critical infrastructure. Botswana experienced a crucial juncture during this period, epitomised by a landmark conference that brought together government and private sector stakeholders to develop a roadmap for decentralisation and the

democratisation of institutions supporting local entrepreneurship. This institutional transformation dramatically increased the number of tourism enterprises, from fewer than four in 1990 to over 479 by 2017. While this rapid growth is notable, it presents considerable risks to the region's conservation efforts. With the proposed Kasane-Kazungula redevelopment plan, tourism is set to consolidate its dominant economic activity, raising concerns about overtourism and environmental degradation. Moving forward, place-based leadership will be crucial in striking a balance between the need for inclusive economic growth and the imperative of environmental sustainability. Finally, Botswana's tourism development did not evolve as a rupture from colonial rule but rather as a gradual branching path shaped by institutional entrepreneurship and place-based leadership (Acemoglu, Johnson, & Robinson, 2002; Good, 1992).

Zambezi, Namibia

The Zambezi region in Namibia is the least dynamic among the three case studies examined. This case underscores the critical role of nation-state-level institutional entrepreneurship. In the absence of concerted efforts by the state to dismantle colonial-era institutional lock-ins and extractive institutions, the region remains trapped in a negative path dependency, isolating it from broader regional integration. The evolution of the tourism path in Zambezi can be divided into three phases, beginning with Namibia's independence in 1990. It is important to note that tourism had been developing under successive colonial regimes before independence. Although national-level institutional entrepreneurs introduced significant policy reforms, such as the Community-Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) program, with support from organisations like the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), these reforms largely consolidated the dominance of foreign and white actors within the tourism industry.

In the second phase, some growth is evident, with the number of enterprises increasing from 24 in 2005 to 61 in 2019. However, most new enterprises are run by lifestyle entrepreneurs who prioritise non-economic goals over profit maximisation. Tourism receipts, in terms of both visitor numbers and revenue generation, reflect the industry's ongoing structural challenges.

7.1.2 Participation and Value Capture in Tourism Value Chains

The second set of results reviews the causal factors of uneven participation and value capture in the tourism path in Victoria Falls, which is skewed towards foreign and white-owned businesses. Using the concept of colonality of power, my results categorise control of the economy, knowledge, and authority as the forces perpetuating colonial continuities,

particularly through exclusionary market access, racialised labour relations, land dispossessions and capture of local institutions. Firstly, my results provide a detailed historical review of how the Victoria Falls tourism industry emerged from the British colonial imaginary of travel and leisure. These imaginaries persist to date and are mobilised to develop a path imagined in its colonial underpinnings. This significantly shapes and affects the way tourism unfolds in contemporary Zimbabwe. This review also shows how Victoria Falls was dispossessed of its local indigenous population, who used it as a place of worship, rain-making, and other spiritual events. Thus, the emergence of tourism and the renaming of Victoria Falls from “Syuungwe na Mutitima” and its persistence to date reflect this imaginary.

Secondly, the study provides a detailed value chain map that outlines the various segments and activities of the Victoria Falls tourism path. Thus, I identified 253 enterprises operating in Victoria Falls and their respective owners. This mapping allowed me to detail how foreign and white-owned players dominate the industry and capture significant value from tourism. Furthermore, my results demonstrate how local populations were displaced from their land and how those colonial land ownership patterns persist stubbornly to this day. The study shows that land constitutes a critical spatial resource in the tourism economy, given the territorial embeddedness and place-specific nature of tourism production and consumption. It thus demonstrates that contemporary patterns of land ownership as reflected in the location of high-value tourism spaces are deeply rooted in colonial geographies of dispossession and racialised spatial ordering. These historically constituted land regimes continue to shape differential access to tourism value chains, privileging white capital and marginalising Black entrepreneurs. As such, land emerges not only as a material resource but also as a site of structural power and contestation central to the project of decolonising tourism development in Southern Africa

7.1.3 Future visions and narratives as drivers of new path development

The third set of findings examines the historical evolution of future-oriented imaginaries in shaping new tourism development paths within the KAZA region. Based on the framework outlined below, cross-border tourism development is conceptualised as a three-stage process: emergence, takeoff, and consolidation. Progression through these stages is driven by the agentic mobilisation of four key resources: knowledge, markets, financial investment, and legitimacy. The findings highlight how tourist destinations evolve within transboundary conservation areas, with a particular emphasis on the role of imaginaries in shaping path

trajectories. In the emergence phase, actors mobilise narratives such as “Conservation Frontiers,” “Peace Parks – A Global Solution,” and “An Africa Without Fences.” These imaginaries are used strategically to enlist support from the state and extra-regional stakeholders, while simultaneously rearticulating the role of nature and capital in tourism development. At this stage, legitimacy, knowledge, and financial investment are the primary resources mobilised, while market formation remains limited.

During the takeoff phase, imaginaries such as “Tourism Without Borders” emerge, signalling the opening of new opportunity spaces for cross-border tourism. Market formation becomes a central resource, alongside continued efforts to secure investment, legitimacy, and knowledge. However, the KAZA initiative has not consolidated fully, primarily due to divergent institutional contexts and inconsistent policy regimes across member states. Despite sharing ecological and geographic resources, countries like Namibia and Angola continue to struggle with the colonial legacies of extractive institutions and rigid national borders, which inhibit the development of a coherent regional tourism path. Moreover, limited knowledge exchange and weak cross-border coordination further constrain the emergence of integrated tourism activities.

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7.2 Conceptual Reflections: Understanding Destination Evolution in SSA

7.2.1 The Role of Human Agency in Destination Development

This thesis presents an economic geography perspective on the role of agency in the uneven growth trajectories of tourism destinations, with a particular focus on structurally weak areas in the Global South. It makes three key conceptual contributions to ongoing debates on regional development. First, while the role of agency in regional industrial restructuring has been widely discussed, there is a notable lack of attention to how this process unfolds in peripheral regions of the Global South, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. As Grillitsch et al. (2025, p.2) note, “most studies on the role of agency in regional development have been conducted in the context of high-income countries. Even though these studies tend to engage with the topic of uneven development, few studies address this question in low or middle-income countries.” This raises a critical question: What makes the exercise of agency distinctive in African peripheral contexts?

Peripheral regions are often treated as homogenous spaces defined by limited industrial clustering, weak knowledge networks, and constrained capital flows. However, recent scholarship (e.g., Nilsen et al., 2022) highlights their internal diversity and complexity. This thesis presents an in-depth case study that demonstrates that Southern Africa and much of the Global South, as regions, are plagued by enduring colonial legacies, minimal industrial restructuring, and recurring negative path dependencies (Todtling & Trippl, 2005; Engerman & Sokoloff, 1997). These features result in what can be termed “thin” contexts for agency conditions not unlike those in some peripheral regions of the Global North. The historical and geopolitical marginalisation of many of these regions means they remain neglected in both national development strategies and global policy discourse, as evidenced by the case of Namibia. As a result, this builds on the second point of this thesis, which is that the nation-state

in Africa is critical for the exercise of agency through institutional entrepreneurship, to dismantle colonial legacies that hinder actors from initiating industrial paths. Conceptually, the thesis therefore goes beyond affirming the explanatory power of the trinity of change agency concept by Grillitsch et al. (2020), but to spotlight the multiscalarity of one of its components: institutional entrepreneurship. This is crucial because the role of the state in shaping the “actors' room to manoeuvre” (Dinmore et al., 2023) has not been sufficiently explored (Weller & Beer, 2023; Hutchinson & Eversole, 2022).

Thirdly, much of the literature on agency assumes the presence of identifiable agents at the regional level, such as innovative entrepreneurs, institutional entrepreneurs, or place-based leaders, who drive transformative change. However, findings from this study challenge that assumption. In all examined regions, place-based leadership as a form of agency was notably absent. Instead, such leadership required substantial time and external investment to emerge and become effective. Similarly, Schumpeterian forms of innovative entrepreneurship were lacking in certain contexts, such as Namibia. This absence can be understood through the historical legacy of extractive colonial institutions across much of Africa, which prioritised resource extraction over investment in human capital, particularly in rural and marginalised areas. These patterns persisted post-independence (Acemoglu, Johnson, & Robinson, 2005). This research contributes to the broader structure–agency debate, particularly the analytical focus on questions of *who* possesses the capacity to act and *what* conditions shape their influence on regional development (Dinmore et al., 2023). Supporting this perspective, studies such as Bolt and Bezemer (2008) highlight how colonial education systems in Africa were designed to produce labourers rather than entrepreneurs, offering further explanation for the limited presence of local actors in regional transformation processes.

7.2.2 Agency and the Future: Spatial Imaginaries as drivers of new path development

The second set of conceptual reflections on path development addresses the role of future imaginaries in shaping the evolution of tourism destinations. The study makes its contribution to the emerging literature on the influence of spatial imaginaries in destination development by presenting a framework that builds upon the Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) proposed by Richard Butler (1980) and the early path formation model by Binz et al. (2005). Firstly, I conceptualise transboundary destinations (TBCA), such as the Kavango Zambezi Trans-Frontier Conservation Area (KAZA), as spatial imaginaries that serve as platforms for the

emergence and expansion of cross-border tourism. This conceptualisation relies on existing research, which increasingly recognises transboundary areas as integrated socio-spatial configurations that facilitate cross-border tourism through shared visions of conservation and socio-economic development (Chaderopa, 2013; Flynn, 1997; Noe, 2020; Ramutsindela, 2007). Furthermore, tourism, by its nature, seems to thrive in remote and peripheral regions, unlike other activities that typically flourish in urban agglomerations, making TBCA a suitable space for cross-border tourism development.

Secondly, the evolution of cross-border tourism in these settings typically unfolds through three stages: emergence, takeoff, and consolidation. Throughout these phases, key actors encounter a range of challenges and opportunities that influence development trajectories. To advance their visions or spatial narratives, actors mobilise four critical resources: knowledge, markets, financial investment, and legitimacy. This study, therefore, advances current debates on the causative role of the future in shaping socio-spatial change (Benner, 2025). It offers a deeper understanding of how agents construct and deploy imaginaries to interpret, navigate, and transform their spatial contexts. Finally, the thesis provides an empirical study that shows how imaginaries shape regional opportunity spaces and how this influences path formation. This ultimately answers the question of “how the future motivates, influences, and constitutes the actions of human agency, which is interwoven with the discourses, practices, and materialities of the present” (Gong, 2024, p.295).

7.2.3 The role of history in the governance of tourism paths: A Coloniality approach

The third and final conceptual contribution of this thesis relates to the governance of tourism paths and the possibilities for their decolonisation. A key research question addressed in this thesis is: How do history and colonialism influence the capture of value and participation in tourism value chains? This was explored through an in-depth case study of the Victoria Falls tourism value chain. Below, I summarise the conceptual contributions from the case-study results:

Firstly, the study examines the governance of the Global Value Chains (GVCs) using the coloniality approach to uncover the structural inequalities that exist between local and international players involved in tourism in Victoria Falls. This value chain is often celebrated as a successful example of integrating into regional and global value chains without a critical examination of the power dynamics that shape the winners and losers. By definition,

Coloniality refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism but that define culture, labour, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations” (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p. 243). Conceptually, there are four power matrices through which coloniality manifests itself: control of the economy, control of knowledge, control of authority, *and* control of gender and sexuality (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012). The thesis, therefore, discusses how to disentangle value chains from these power matrices, with a particular focus on the control of the economy, knowledge, and authority. This discussion contributes to a growing body of studies that have sparked critical dialogues about the nature of power, discourse, and representation in the tourism industry (Bianchi, 2009; Ateljevic et al., 2007). These dialogues were given impetus by the “Rhodes Must Fall” movement, which began in South Africa in 2015.

On Coloniality of knowledge, that is, the politics of who generates knowledge, how it is produced, and to what end, the study argues that meaningful decolonisation begins with reorienting tourism studies away from neoliberal and Euro-Anglocentric paradigms towards epistemologically inclusive frameworks (Chambers & Buzinde, 2015). It highlights how African knowledge production systems can empower Africans to be both producers and consumers of tourism experiences, challenging dominant narratives that position Africa primarily as a passive site of exotic consumption. As Mudimbe (1994) observes, Africa continues to be constructed through Western “fantasies and constructs,” a form of epistemic domination that shapes how African destinations are imagined and marketed. These imaginaries, such as the persistent portrayal of Africa as “wild” and “untouched”, propagated under the projective authority and agency of tourism, undermine local development plans and erase African agency, particularly in domestic and intra-African tourism (Ayikoru, 2024). Despite significant cross-border mobility for tourism, business, and familial purposes, African travellers are often excluded from official tourism statistics, reflecting globalised and exclusionary definitions of tourism. Practical steps to address the above issues include rebalancing the overrepresentation of non-African authors on African issues, increasing direct access to funding grants by African scholars, and revising the division of labour on equal terms. Additionally, rethinking tourism education, curricula, and training in African universities is essential, as they have been modelled after colonial or Western education systems with little regard for domestic values and interests (Crawford et al., 2021).

The second key theme examines the coloniality matrix, focusing on the control of the economy (land, markets, and labour), and highlighting how these dynamics continue to shape tourism in

postcolonial Africa. This is a crucial consideration, as tourism is inherently dependent on access to natural resources and landscapes, which often serve as the primary attractions. Yet, despite tourism's capacity to transform and commodify space and livelihoods, it remains inadequately theorised as a form of capitalist development, particularly within Sub-Saharan Africa (Young & Markham, 2020; Britton, 1991). Tourism in Africa dates back to the late 19th century, when the interests of the travelling elite colonial powers shaped it. Its production and consumption were tailored to serve foreign visitors, excluding Africans, either through legal barriers or economic exclusion (Harrison, 2000). Colonial authorities maintained control over the land and means of production, a pattern that persists in many forms today. Despite over six decades of political independence, colonial-era property relations and labour structures continue to define tourism economies in countries like Zimbabwe, Namibia, and Botswana. Land reform efforts have largely failed to democratise tourism spaces, instead giving rise to neoliberal conservation models that commodify nature and wildlife to fund their preservation (Büscher & Fletcher, 2014; Büscher, 2011).

Foreign actors still dominate the sector, with an estimated 70% or more of African tourism assets and markets controlled by international stakeholders (Christie, Fernandes, & Messerli, 2013). Tourism continues to be geared toward satisfying international leisure needs, often at the expense of local ownership, control, and benefit. Decolonising control of the economy in tourism, therefore, requires the democratisation of land and wildlife ownership, placing Indigenous populations at the centre of tourism planning and benefit-sharing. Botswana's Kasane/Kazungula Redevelopment Plan is one promising example, wherein substantial public investment has been directed toward supporting local tourism entrepreneurs and enhancing community participation. This thesis contributes to these debates by problematising the economic dimensions of tourism coloniality and proposing concrete mechanisms for restructuring ownership, access, and governance in pursuit of more equitable and sustainable tourism futures.

To conclude, this thesis make conceptual contributions in three broad but interrelated areas: firstly it conceptualises the role of agency in path development in post-colonial African states by strengthening the explanatory power of the Trinity of Change Agency Concept, secondly it conceptualises the cause role of the future or spatial imaginaries in the evolution of cross-border destinations and lastly it uses the coloniality concept to examine participation and value capture in tourism regional value chains thus showing the path dependent nature of tourism development in Southern Africa.

7.3 Policy Implications: A Challenge for KAZA

The findings of this dissertation carry significant policy implications across multiple scales. As the research is situated within the broader framework of the Future Rural Africa Collaborative Research Centre (CRCTRR-228) at the University of Cologne, which investigates the impacts of growth corridors in Africa, the initial policy recommendations naturally focus on this domain. Growth corridors are increasingly recognised as spatial instruments for promoting development on the continent (Dannenberg, Revilla Diez, & Schiller, 2018). This project explicitly explores the influence of cross-border growth corridors on the territorial organisation of value chains, evaluating the extent to which local stakeholders can respond to associated challenges, actively engage in these processes, and derive meaningful benefits. The overarching aim is to foster more equitable and sustainable development outcomes. This research contributes to a broader body of scholarship examining how place-based policies, particularly the integration of corridors into Global Value Chains (GVCS) and Global Production Networks (GPNS), shape processes of territorial coupling, negotiation, and transformation (Gálvez & Webber, 2017). My specific focus has been on the agency of local actors and their capacity to appropriate and shape growth corridor dynamics in ways that align with their visions of desirable futures. In light of this discussion, I propose the following policy recommendations:

i. Rebalancing Tourism Value Chains in the KAZA

The Southern African Development Community (SADC), particularly the five countries involved in the KAZA initiative, should seriously re-examine the role and influence of international actors in the tourism value chains. While foreign investments are valuable, the current dynamics favour international actors, limiting the roles of local stakeholders to low-value positions, such as waged labour, rather than ownership of business enterprises. To address this imbalance, SADC should:

- Strengthen financial support mechanisms for local entrepreneurs (A classic example is the Citizen Entrepreneurial Development Agency (CEDA), which has supported over 95 tourism start-ups in the Chobe district of Botswana since its formation in 2001. Such mechanisms are missing in all the other four countries. For example, while Victoria Falls tourism path is integrated into regional and international value chains, the benefits are not evenly shared (Mlilo, 2024b).

- Prioritise land access for community-led tourism enterprises, drawing on models such as the Kazungula-Kasane Redevelopment Plan in Botswana. Currently, land use patterns that are a legacy of colonialism remain stubbornly in place and are beyond the scope of local, place-based leaders and institutional entrepreneurs, thus requiring the influence of the nation-state.
- Invest in targeted capacity-building programs that empower local actors to engage in and lead high-value segments, including marketing and representation in tourism source markets.

ii. Dismantling Colonial Legacies in Tourism and Advancing Regional Integration through AfCFTA

Tourism in the KAZA continues to be shaped by colonial legacies that privilege Eurocentric narratives and marginalise local cultures and knowledge systems. To create a more inclusive and locally based tourism model, the five countries must promote domestic and rural tourism by restoring indigenous knowledge systems and reimagining tourism beyond colonial frames. The disruptions to the value chain during the COVID-19 pandemic highlight the urgent need for a rethink (Rogerson & Baum, 2020). These recommendations align with the protocol on trade in services and the free movement of persons, which is part of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) trade agreement established in 2018 by the African Union. By aligning tourism with AfCFTA commitments, SADC can:

- Facilitate increased cross-border tourism flows by easing visa restrictions and harmonising border operations. Current frameworks hinder the goal of a single tourism destination in the KAZA. While KAZA has introduced the KAZA-UNIVISA, its implementation remains stalled and inconsistent.
- Promote intra-African travel and tourism markets to reduce overdependence on external source markets. Currently, the focus of African tourism is on attracting international guests rather than promoting local and regional travel.
- Encourage tourism products that celebrate and trade in African heritage, language, and culture. For example, in Zimbabwe, the original local sub-tribes along the Zambezi, who possess extensive knowledge of the river, Victoria Falls, and its cultural significance, remain absent from any activity offerings. Enterprises have not created any programs to increase their visibility and integrate them into the broader value chain.

iii. Rebalancing Conservation and Tourism futures with other social and economic livelihoods

Development narratives in the KAZA are dominated by tourism and conservation. Various international actors privilege and employ various techniques to keep these narratives at the forefront of the agenda, presenting them as solutions to both Anthropocene risks and livelihood challenges. These narratives are driven by neoliberal models of nature conservation discourses that marginalise local actors, thereby affecting how African futures are imagined, negotiated, and enacted. In light of the above, SADC can adopt the following policy options;

- Shift away from hegemonic tourism and conservation models to more inclusive tourism approaches. In the discussion on future research below, I provide evidence of emerging local economic activities that remain suppressed due to the dominance of tourism and conservation. In an era of uncertainty and crisis which threatens tourism value chains (Chisadza et al., 2022), it stands to reason that KAZA governments must develop integrated regional policies that recognise and support diverse local economies.
- Embrace systematic and axial transformation. Policymakers should support and institutionalise frameworks like convivial conservation, which prioritise coexistence, justice, and sustainability rather than exclusion and profit-driven conservation. While large-scale imaginaries like KAZA promise integration, they promote colonial conservation programs that favour tourism and conservation over local livelihoods.
- Reimagine Africa's future through locally led innovation. The voices of local actors remain limited in planning and policy design in the KAZA, influencing land use, tourism, and conservation narratives. In Namibia, for example, while CBNRM is celebrated as a success in the coexistence between nature and humans, its benefits to locals remain very limited (Kalvelage et al., 2022).

7.4 Reflections on Future Research Agenda

In this section, I reflect on an important topic that can be considered part of the future research agenda emerging from the PhD project. There are renewed calls in Southern Africa for a transformation of the dominant conservation and tourism discourses, which uphold unequal power structures and accumulation. To address these calls, I provide a clear overview of alternative futures that threaten or could diversify tourism and conservation as dominant industries. Accordingly, I present pathways and evidence that demonstrate why these emerging topics should be taken seriously and how they can be approached in future research studies.

7.4.1 Alternative Futures in the KAZA: Is Tourism Destiny? Unsettling Dominant Narratives in KAZA's Development Trajectory

For over a century, tourism and conservation (Buscher, 2010; Mlilo et al., 2024; UNWTO, 2024) have long constituted dominant narratives within the Kavango Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area (KAZA). These hegemonic discourses are embedded and shaped by colonial continuities and neoliberal models of nature conservation discourses (Büscher, 2011), often marginalising alternative development pathways and local agency. However, mounting pressures from social justice movements, as well as multiple global and local crises, are increasingly destabilising these narratives and reopening fundamental questions about how African futures are imagined, negotiated, and enacted. These pressures coincide with increased demands for axial transformation in tourism and convivial conservation (O'Brien et al., 2013), reflecting a need for systemic change. Nevertheless, despite these new threats, some questions remain unanswered: What does this axial transformation and convivial conservation mean in practice? If the local economies are to be diversified, what types of futures are possible and for whom? To answer these questions, I present a discussion based on extensive fieldwork in four countries (Botswana, Zimbabwe, Zambia and Namibia), analysing the mechanisms and tactics that have sustained and institutionalised hegemonic conservation and tourism narratives. It also identifies sites of resistance and emerging alternatives that challenge the status quo. This reflection extends the debates on how development projects and narratives are shaped and contested, as well as how contradictions and new narratives challenge them. In doing so, it advances a critical understanding of the possibilities for reimagining the future of KAZA beyond the tourism-conservation binary.

Origins of the current dominant discourses on tourism and conservation

Tourism and conservation histories are intricately intertwined. The environment is an integral part of tourism; thus, protecting scenic and historic heritage is a strategic interest for the tourism industry. In chapter four of the thesis (Mlilo et al., 2024b)– I conclude that as a result of how colonial imaginaries of Africa were constructed, in which ‘Europeans’ saw themselves as developed, superior or modern while Africa underdeveloped or wild, the continent became to be increasingly framed as a space where wild animals lived and could be seen (Garland, 2000). The twin effect of this imaginary was that Europeans flocked to Africa for tourism to view animals in “Wild Africa” because, as Buscher & Dietz (2005) observe, animals in Africa occupied a ‘mythical status’ because of their aesthetic value and grandeur. Secondly, to support the expansion of Europe, animals in Africa were seen as having significant economic value. John McKenzie, in "The Empire of Nature," illustrates the environmental consequences of predatory colonial hunting, which catastrophically depleted animal populations (McKenzie, 1988). The result was that post-World War II (1940s-60s) colonial Africa was pushed towards active conservation regimes or imaginaries (what others call an apocalyptic vision). These apocalyptic conceptions were initially driven by the Society for the Preservation of Wild Fauna of the Empire, formed in 1903, and later fueled by global conservation movements that emerged after the 1940s. The internationalisation of conservation efforts directed towards Africa, consolidated by major conferences such as the Convention for the Preservation of Wild Animals, birds and Fish in Africa held in London as well as Arusha the Conference in Tanzania, was attended by over 140 participants from 21 African countries, including five international organisations and six non-African states signifying the importance and by in for conservation narratives by the newly independent African states (Curry-Lindahl, 1974).

The Internationalisation of conservation drove the imaginary of Africa as a “Conservation Continent” that needed to be “saved”, but curiously disregarded existing conservation narratives and practices that had hitherto been effective. It was commonplace across Africa that many locals were displaced from their homes and had their land taken away to make way for conservation (Hitchcock, 1995). The outcome was that large areas of land were cordoned off as national parks and various conservation areas in what Dan Brockington called ‘Fortress Conservation’ (Brockington, 2002). In effect, conservation movements sought to commodify nature so that the “sale of nature to save it” became a rallying slogan. In this way, African wildlife watching became a lucrative attraction, which propelled the growth of tourism. Thus, tourism became a legitimising force for the expansion of protected areas (d’Hauteserre 2004;

Gilbert 2007). In the final analysis, protected spaces thus evolved to become connected and part of the global circulation of commodity relations, particularly in spaces of tourism management. Conservation facilitates capital accumulation by various actors, including tourism and conservation NGOs (Kroecker-Maus, 2014, p. 172).

The above framework encapsulates how conservation and tourism evolved in the rest of Africa, which includes the KAZA area. However, by 1990, fortress conservation tactics had reached their epistemic limits. It was increasingly clear that separating people from conservation spaces was unworkable. The new approach emphasised community involvement in conservation and was underpinned by participatory development and decentralisation of natural resource management narratives (Barrow & Murphree, 2001). The Community-Based Natural Resource Management approach aimed to create spaces where various actors could conserve nature through sustainable use and management. The transfrontier parks, including KAZA, are built on this approach of seamless coexistence between nature and communities. This “win-win” approach promotes legitimate conservation narratives and enables the expansion of tourism as a source of income for various stakeholders (Ramutsindela, 2007).

Mechanisms and tactics to reproduce and maintain these discourses

The dominance of tourism alongside conservation developed over time, as demonstrated in the above short history. Several mechanisms and tools have supported the construction and institutionalisation of this hegemony. Based on an extensive literature review, these mechanisms can be summarised under four primary classes: *political-economic restructuring* (Büscher & Fletcher, 2014; Fletcher, 2010; Duffy, 2013; Fairhead et al., 2013), *securitisation and Control of Space* (Massé & Lunstrum, 2016; Lunstrum, 2014; Duffy, 2014), *State power and governance capture* (Peluso, 1993; Igoe et al., 2010; Corson, 2010), and *discursive and ideological framing* (Buscher, 2013; West et al., 2006). I provide detailed explanations below:

The first category, ***political-economic restructuring*** in tourism and conservation, involves a broad shift towards neoliberalisation, privatisation, and financialisation, all operating through market-based logics. This includes the commodification of nature, the rise of public-private partnerships, and the expansion of ecotourism initiatives. Since the 1980s, conservation efforts have increasingly relied on market mechanisms, with tourism playing a central role in commodifying nature. These trends have intensified under global neoliberal reforms, which present themselves as the most sustainable solution to environmental crises (Moore, 2011). As Büscher (2011) notes, the neoliberalisation of nature in Africa has been framed as an "inverted

commons", resources considered global public goods, yet whose conservation costs are disproportionately borne by Africans. This framing legitimates the activities of international NGOs, such as the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), The Nature Conservancy (TNC), and the Peace Parks Foundation (PPF). It creates an urgency for local actors to protect the "inverted commons". Additionally, it enhances the dominance and power of these NGOs over natural resources through the gradual withdrawal of the state from local resource management (Levine, 2002).

However, unlike earlier conservation approaches that displaced local communities, current strategies promote coexistence through models such as community-based natural resource management (CBNRM). These decentralised, community-based models facilitate the convergence of neoliberal capitalism and environmental conservation within a "win-win" framework, which Doane (2012) refers to as "Accumulation by Conservation." A considerable amount of literature has already emerged to highlight the shortcomings of these strategies in terms of their distributional effects (Kalvelage et al., 2022; Mlilo et al., 2024b) and their effectiveness in protecting the environment (Garland, 2008; Fletcher, 2012). The objective here is to demonstrate how such processes render conservation and tourism the dominant narratives. Thus, the emergence of transfrontier conservation parks (Borgerhoff & Coppolillo, 2005), such as KAZA, after the 1990s, has become one of the key tools facilitating the rollout of neoliberal conservation. These spaces receive substantial financial support from international banks, including the KfW in Germany, and promote various community-conservation mechanisms through their partners in the NGO sector. For the KAZA secretariat, for example, at least 65 million Euros have been committed in the last decade to secure conservation regimes (KAZA, 2019). However, hundreds of millions have also been mobilised through other NGOs, such as PPF. There are currently over 200 TFCAs worldwide, with 13 of these located in Southern Africa (SADC, 2019). These initiatives demonstrate how the convergence or collusion of neoliberal restructuring, conservation institutional tourism, and dominant development narratives is evident.

The second method concerns the *securitisation and control of space* as a mechanism for establishing conservation and tourism as the dominant development narratives in KAZA. It involves an increasing use of military-style strategies, violence, surveillance technologies, and security discourses to manage protected areas and wildlife, often justified by the necessity to combat poaching and illegal resource use. There are currently over 8,448 protected areas across Africa, with more than 36 national parks in the KAZA region alone, which are enabled or

contingent upon the securitisation of space (UNEP-WCMC and IUCN, 2020). However, research shows that these forms of securitisation are not solely about protection; they also facilitate new forms of capitalist accumulation by creating exclusive zones for tourism and conservation investment (Massé & Lunstrum, 2016). Other scholars (Lunstrum, 2014) have termed this process, in which military approaches and values are embedded in conservation, ‘green militarisation’, while others regard it as a ‘war for biodiversity’ (Duffy, 2014) or ‘accumulation by securitisation’ (Massé & Lunstrum, 2016). However, the various forms of securitisation are not always violent - the creation of new frontiers (Peluso & Lund, 2008, p. 668) with new land uses, new formations of control and authority, and new enclosures, such as those spread across the KAZA, reflect the other variations and the possibilities for accumulation. Regardless of the terminology, these strategies are not new and have a long historical genealogy dating back to 9th-century Britain. Cox (1905) has pointed out that the cordoning of natural areas in early England for the enjoyment of royal elites resembles the neo-militarised conservation strategies (Hill, 1996). Later, during the European colonisation of Africa, an emerging form of conservation, ‘fortress conservation’ (Brockington, 2002), arose in which large tracts of land were cordoned off and cleared of communities to make way for protected and conservation areas (Bollig, 2020). Newly independent states and their leaders supported this process. As Julius Nyerere famously noted in 1961, arguing that, “The survival of our wildlife is a matter of grave concern to all of us in Africa. These wild creatures amid the wild places they inhabit are not only important as a source of wonder and inspiration but are an integral part of our natural resources and of our future livelihood and well-being (...) the conservation of wildlife and wild places calls for specialist knowledge, trained manpower and money.” (IUCN 1963: 12). The constituent governments in the KAZA enforce various security measures driven by the same military rationales. Between Botswana and Namibia, these initiatives have sparked a diplomatic row due to the perceived heavy-handedness of Botswana's anti-poaching operations. In Zimbabwe, similar reports have surfaced. The objective is not to narrate all military and security operations, but to conceptualise this tool as a mechanism to enforce tourism and conservation.

The third mechanism, *State power and governance capture*, relates to processes in which state institutions and regulatory frameworks are co-opted and strategically aligned with the interests and agendas of the transnational conservation actors and other private sector players to facilitate conservation and tourism. Both the colonial and postcolonial states in Africa have developed strong collaborations, which have been shaped by changing views on conservation.

These views have been reflected in a shift from top-down to more community-based mechanisms, but the overriding concept has been to facilitate capital accumulation. Buscher (2013) has traced the evolution of peace parks (TFCAs) in Africa, noting the role of PPF, ICUN, World Bank, WWF, and AWF as key facilitators. The extensive review reveals how these large international NGOs co-opted the state, including supra-national governance structures at the SADC level, to adopt their agenda for the rollout of transfrontier conservation areas. The formalisation of KAZA in 2011, including the formulation of country-specific structures that facilitate transfrontier conservation through national and cross-boundary legislation, represents these new forms of institutions. Beyond co-option, big NGOs also now possess decision-making power within governance spaces. For example, the Peace Parks Foundation (PPF) provides financial, technical, and human resources to government environmental departments. By supplying these resources, PPF gains political access and influence over policy decisions, as its support shapes the work of officials involved in the policy process (Buscher & Dietz, 2005). PPF and other Big NGOs also exercise regulatory power, setting standards for compliance in the KAZA, regulating access, and conduct.

In Namibia, for example, an emerging community-based natural resource management system (CBNRM) exemplifies the governance institutions that bring together the state, NGOs, and communities based on principles expounded in the “governance of commons” (Ostrom, 1990). In Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe, Mlilo et al. (2024b) demonstrate how private sector companies can utilise “commons” for their private interests under the guise of conservation and tourism. The Zimbabwe National Parks facilitate this “Green grabbing” (Fairhead et al., 2012) in the national parks in the name of eco-tourism in exchange for tax income. This same logic explains why private companies can establish enterprises in ecologically sensitive areas of the Chobe National Park (Mlilo et al., 2024a). The Kasane-Kazungula Redevelopment Plan in the same area demonstrates the Botswana government's intention to transform large tracts of public land into spaces for tourism consumption, thereby alienating other forms of public ownership.

Lastly, *discursive and ideological framing* refers to the use of narratives, imagery and representations to legitimise and normalise particular models of environmental governance, often by masking the underlying power dynamics. KAZA conservation and tourism futures are framed as a win-win, facilitating capital accumulation for both private and communities with broader biodiversity goals. Ultimately, conservation actors manufacture consent through ideas and agendas manufactured at the international level (Gramsci, 1971b). One could argue that these discursive and ideological frames of conservation and tourism facilitate the mechanisms

discussed above. In the KAZA, tourism is viewed as a crucial driver of economic development, providing resources for the conservation and preservation of the natural environment. Given the various apocalyptic visions of the tragedy of the commons, conservation and tourism are therefore seen as unavoidable tools that facilitate the transition towards sustainable development.

Are there Possible futures? Case studies from four countries

There are increasing calls to diversify the dominant regional tourism and conservation futures as the region faces multiple crises and concerns. Firstly, several parts of Southern Africa face the worst mid-season dry spell in over 100 years, characterised by the lowest seasonal rainfall.⁸ This results from El Niño-driven droughts, which drive temperatures to higher-than-usual levels and longer drought seasons than in the past 40 years. These extreme weather shocks threaten ecosystems,⁹ and animal populations by accelerating fragmentation, desertification, increasing water scarcity, and exacerbating human-wildlife conflict (Mpolokang et al., 2022). While these shocks appear more severe for 2025, they are becoming increasingly frequent, threatening the future of the regional tourism economy by impacting brand and competitiveness, as over 90% of tourism is dependent on nature-based and biodiversity-driven activities (Zhou, 2023). Secondly, the promise of shared income and benefits from tourism and conservation has not been fully realised. Currently, concerns exist regarding the equity, justice, and exclusivity of tourism and conservation, which primarily benefit a select few actors (Kalvelage et al., 2022; Mlilo et al., 2024a, b). Thirdly, rising unemployment means that the regions in KAZA face pressure and demands from local populations. There are clear plans for Victoria Falls.¹⁰, Livingstone¹¹ Chobe and Katima cities suggest that the local authorities are encroaching on previously reserved areas to open up space for other industries and housing purposes, which presents a massive threat to wildlife ecosystems and corridors. Given the above concerns, I explore below some of the initiatives that are emerging in four countries in the KAZA as alternative development narratives.

⁸ See <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/malawi/southern-africa-el-nino-forecast-and-impact-august-2024>

⁹ See also <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2019/12/victoria-falls-dries-drastically-after-worst-drought-in-a-century/>

¹⁰ See new City plans by Victoria falls - <https://www.vfcc.co.zw/documents/>

¹¹ See Livingstone Integrated plan- <https://www.livingstonecouncil.gov.zm/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/LStone-IDP-2021-2031-7.8.23.pdf>

Zambia- Emerging Agro-processing Zone!

Alongside the tourism sector in Livingstone, a parallel agro-processing value chain is emerging, led by a pioneering firm called Heartlands. This enterprise supports an industrial development pathway focused on poultry, dairy, and feed production through six core units: egg production, chick farming, dairy, frozen chickens, and feed manufacturing. Its products serve local, national, and regional markets, with exports to Angola, Botswana, the DRC, Malawi, Namibia, and Zimbabwe. Each product line inspires clusters of related businesses, supported by key infrastructure, including a feed mill, an abattoir, and an anchor farm.

Heartlands' model relies on a network of 200 fully financed out-grower farms, both individual farmers and cooperatives, contracted to supply at least 3,000 birds each month. The company currently produces around 100,000 trays of eggs and 100,000 chicks weekly, processes 10,000 chickens and 20 tonnes of frozen poultry daily, and supplies dairy products such as milk and yoghurt. It operates 13 depots across Zambia, with five in Livingstone. While rooted in agro-processing, the firm has developed interpath linkages with tourism, as its outputs are consumed by tourists, particularly in the hospitality and retail sectors.

The sector is notable for its relatively low entry barriers, creating space for inclusive economic participation. Zambia's broader tourism industry rebounded strongly in 2024, with a 35% increase over 2023. However, growth in key resort areas such as Livingstone was modest, at just 9% (GOZ, 2024). Despite tourism's dominance and the legal protections reinforcing conservation and heritage, debates over economic diversification are intensifying. Early signs of new industrial and agricultural pathways are emerging, yet institutional change remains slow. Still, climate-related risks are adding urgency to reform efforts, prompting stakeholders to rethink and redesign regional economic futures.

Zimbabwe: Emerging Retail Path

Victoria Falls remains the central hub for both tourism and conservation within the Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area (KAZA) (Mlilo et al., 2024a). It has been designated as a Special Economic Zone (SEZ) for tourism and finance, and the falls themselves are a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The transboundary heritage area covers 6,860 hectares, including 3,779 ha of Mosi-oa-Tunya National Park (Zambia), 2,340 ha of Victoria Falls National Park (Zimbabwe), and 741 ha of the Zambezi National Park riverine strip (Zimbabwe).

Despite its strategic significance, the city's physical development remains constrained. The existing urban layout, developed nearly 50 years ago, has seen minimal change (CVF, 2024). Victoria Falls is encircled by high-value parks and conservation estates, which restrict land use to tourism and conservation purposes. These spatial limits are reinforced by legal frameworks that protect the area's ecological and touristic functions. However, mounting climate pressures are visibly affecting the waterfall, while growing demands for land, particularly for housing and industry, are intensifying these tensions.

The 2024 draft City Expansion Plan introduces two proposed sites for light industrial development. This shift is informed by emerging economic patterns, particularly those associated with the KAZA Univisa, a regional mobility initiative designed to facilitate the movement of tourists across borders. However, the policy has also enabled unexpected outcomes. Zambian immigration authorities report that over 5,000 Zambians cross the border into Zimbabwe daily, many of whom sell vegetables or second-hand goods from China. Special “border passes” now allow at least 3,000 informal traders to enter Victoria Falls each day without passports, creating a vibrant cross-border retail economy that surpasses tourist traffic in volume.

My fieldwork led me to various local markets, revealing an emerging economic path that diverges from conventional tourism. In response, the city is planning for a light industrial zone to support this informal trading economy. Additionally, with more than 5,000 trucks transiting through Victoria Falls each month, plans are underway to establish a central logistics hub. At the heart of the new city plan is a dual development vision: conserving nature while positioning Victoria Falls as a regional financial centre, inspired by models such as Dubai. Although the success of these proposed paths remains uncertain, it is clear that alternative development narratives are gaining ground, challenging dominant conservation-tourism models and opening possibilities for economic diversification in Victoria Falls.

Botswana: Consolidating Conservation and Tourism

The Chobe-Kasane region is one of Southern Africa’s premier tourism destinations, renowned for its rich wildlife and biodiversity. Kasane, with a population of approximately 23,000, relies heavily on tourism, which is the primary source of employment and revenue. Despite its small size, Kasane hosts a thriving tourism economy; as of 2023, there were at least 479 registered tourism operators, collectively receiving over 400,000 international visitors annually (Mlilo et al., 2024a). The government has consistently prioritised wildlife conservation, supported by

strong security and governance mechanisms that help safeguard the ecological assets underpinning tourism.

In 2023, the state launched the Kasane-Kazungula Spatial Development Plan, a large-scale initiative aimed at transforming the region into a modern, integrated tourism hub. The recently completed Kazungula Bridge, a strategic trade and transport corridor, has further boosted these ambitions by positioning Kasane as a potential logistics hub. Zimbabwean authorities report that approximately 50% of cross-border business traffic previously routed through Victoria Falls has now shifted to Botswana, underscoring the bridge's transformative economic impact.

While tourism and conservation remain the dominant development paths, new economic alternatives are emerging, particularly in aquaculture. Given the availability of large freshwater bodies in the Chobe area (Chobe River), around 162 hectares of land have been allocated for fish farming. These ventures are still in their early stages and remain marginal compared to the dominant conservation-tourism regime, but they signal the possibility of diversifying the region's economic base (Stone, 2015).

Namibia: Consolidating Conservation and Tourism

The Zambezi Region, often referred to as *Namibia's forgotten region*, is increasingly being positioned as a tourism-led development zone (Republic of Namibia, 2017). While tourism and conservation dominate land use through the Community-Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) model, which has established over 20 conservancies, the broader economic benefits have scarcely reached local communities (Kalvelage et al., 2022). Although around 20,000 tourists visit Zambezi's three national parks annually, a 2023 survey by the University of Cologne identified only six distinct tourist activities offered by 61 registered companies, with over 70% of these companies focusing primarily on accommodation (Mlilo et al., 2024a).

In response to calls for diversification, the government has introduced alternative development initiatives in agriculture, including rice production through green schemes and aquaculture, also known as fish farming. A classic example is the Kalimbeza Rice project, established on 229 hectares of land in 2010. Despite a bailout of approximately 300,000 euros in 2020, the facility remained non-operational due to ongoing challenges. The Zambezi Regional Land Use Plan (GRN, 2015b) lists seven potential irrigation projects with a total area of 49,250 ha; however, none of them have been implemented because the Ministry of Tourism blocked the projects, arguing that most of the designated land falls within wildlife dispersal and corridors (Dittmann, 2025). However, many of these efforts have struggled to gain traction, mainly due

to a mismatch between the development model and local capacity. Participants in these schemes often lack basic business management, marketing skills and agricultural training (Hulke et al., 2020). Meanwhile, the WWF is supporting five small-scale agricultural projects aimed at diversifying rural livelihoods. However, these initiatives are largely conditional, framed as compensation for communities agreeing to vacate wildlife corridors, thus limiting their potential to drive genuine economic transformation.

A significant structural barrier to agricultural development in Zambezi is the Red Line, officially known as the Veterinary Cordon Fence (VCF). This colonial-era boundary restricts the movement of livestock and animal products from northern communal areas to southern Namibia and export markets. As a result, promising sectors such as agro-processing, cattle farming, and aquaculture are unable to scale up or access broader markets, despite the region's strong ecological and agricultural potential. In effect, agricultural potential alternative or complement to tourism, remains heavily constrained by both policy and historical legacies, limiting efforts to build a more diversified and inclusive regional economy (Galbraith et al., 2025). Hulke et al. (2020, p. 104), in their study on the tensions between conservation and agricultural intensification, conclude, "although farmers envision stepping up their agricultural activities to better position themselves in AVCs, they remain in a strategic hanging in or downgrading state due to CBNRM-related institutions," showing how conservation dominates development narratives.

From axial transformation to convivial conservation in the KAZA

There is a growing debate across disciplines about the urgent need to reimagine African futures. Increasing awareness of uncertainty, combined with rising demands from African communities, has turned the future into an intellectual and political challenge (Müller-Mahn, 2020). Much of this challenge lies in envisioning alternatives to dominant models of future-making. These alternatives face resistance, as deeply entrenched systems often reinforce Afro-pessimism, while hopeful visions are dismissed as unrealistic. Nevertheless, as Shaw (2018, p. 1) argues, "the very gloominess of Africa's predicted future should generate a predisposition to engage in a fundamental reexamination and redirection." This highlights the urgent need for an axial transformation, a conceptual lens that calls for profound, structural shifts in institutions, worldviews, and the logics underpinning the global economy. Decolonial scholar Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2014) asks a provocative question: Can Africans create African futures within a modern world system shaped by global coloniality? In response, Büscher and Fletcher (2019, 2020) present a concrete example of axial transformation through convivial

conservation, a radical rethinking of conservation and tourism that prioritises justice, equity, and structural change. Rooted in diverse social theories and global movements, convivial conservation advocates for a post-capitalist model grounded in environmental justice and relational ways of being.

Convivial conservation is rooted in five key principles. First, it advocates for a shift “From protected to promoted areas.” This approach challenges the human-nature divide inherent in protected area models. While traditional conservation often excludes people to “protect” nature, promoted areas invite people as co-inhabitants, guests, or stewards, fostering mutually beneficial relationships with ecosystems and breaking away from the militarised logic of exclusion. Second, it promotes “Saving both humans and non-humans”: conservation should not prioritise biodiversity at the expense of human well-being, but should address both simultaneously. The third principle, “From voyeuristic tourism to engaged visitation,” argues that mainstream tourism commodifies nature and often perpetuates inequality and ecological damage. Instead, convivial conservation advocates for immersive, respectful, and community-centred engagements with nature. The fourth principle, “from spectacle to everyday environmentalism,” states that conservation must go beyond curated imagery and experiences (Igoe, 2010) and reconnect people with nature as part of their daily lives, not just as a tourist spectacle. Lastly, the principle of Convivial Conservation calls for a shift from top-down, expert-driven models to participatory approaches rooted in local agency. This includes addressing power imbalances across scales, acknowledging historical injustices, and advancing reparative mechanisms such as a conservation basic income.

Together, these principles reflect a bold vision for reimagining conservation and tourism in Africa through the lens of conviviality, decoloniality, and deep structural transformation. Kiwango & Mabele (2022) provide three key points in a review of convivial conservation. They argue that most of the five principles reflect a Global North perspective on conservation, ignoring the realities of institutional path dependencies in conservation agencies of the Global South. Secondly, and related to the first point, most countries in the Global South rely heavily on the export of nature tourism for national economic development. Tourism is primarily viewed as a means to promote economic development and create jobs. Thirdly, various national-level political interests often undermine efforts to promote democratic governance and decision-making for community-level conservation activities. The result is that such proposals need further refinement to make meaningful change.

7.5 Conclusion

To conclude, industrial path formation in tourism destinations in Southern Africa is a complex path-dependent evolutionary process, shaped by the interplay of multi-scalar change agents, their ability to recognise and act on opportunities, navigate institutional reforms, and overcome structural constraints. Tourism in these regions unfolds rather unevenly due to colonial dependencies, institutional hybridity, and a weak socio-economic context. Human Agency, therefore, plays a crucial role in breaking the lock-ins into transformation, and in certain instances, it can also be constrained by existing structural conditions.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Supplementary material

Table 8: List of interview partners and focus group discussions

Method	Name of business/ Industry	Location	Date
1. Interview	Ministry of Tourism National Office- Windhoek	Windhoek	09/2022
2. Interview	UNAM-Main Campus	Windhoek	09/ 2022
3. Interview	Zambezi Regional Council	Katima	10/ 2022
4. Interview		Katima	
5. Interview	3 Palms Restaurant	Katima	10/ 2022
6. Interview	Kolosi Lodges	Kongola	10/ 2022
7. Interview	FNB Bank	Katima	10/2022
8. Interview	Standard Bank	Katima	10/2022
9. Interview	Katima Town Council	Katima	07/2022
10. Interview	Riverside Guest Lodge	Katima	10/ 2022
11. Interview	Caprivi Adventures	Katima	10/ 2022
12. Interview	Mukolo Camp	Kongola	10/2022
13. Interview	Happy Forest Lodge	Katima	10/2022
14. Interview	Camp Kwando	Mbengela Village, Namibia	14/10/2022
15. Interview	Riverside Lodge	Katima	10/2022
16. Interview	ZVTC	Katima	10/2022
17. Interview	Protea Hotel	Katima	10/2022
18. Interview	IRDNC	Katima	10/2022
19. Interview	Min of Industry and Trade	Katima	10/2022
20. Interview	Juda House Lodge	Katima	10/2022
21. Interview	Geoline Guest House	Katima	10/2022
22. Interview	Caprivi Mutoya Lodge	Katima	10/2022
23. Interview	African Monarch Lodges	Katima	10/2022
24. Interview	Wild Waters Group	Katima	10/2022
25. Interview	Gondwana Collection	Katima	10/2022
26. Interview	University of Namibia	Katima	10/2022
27. Interview	Department of environment; MEFT	Katima	10/2022
28. FDG	Local black business	Katima	10/2022

Table 9: Interview and FDG list Victoria Falls

Specialization	Targets	Company scope/ Method	Date
City Government	1. Mayor of the City of Victoria Falls	- Institutional entrepreneur	29/10
	2. Economic Development and Investment Manager	- Institutional entrepreneur	31/10
	3. Zimbabwe Republic Police-Tourism Police Section	- Institutional entrepreneur	23/11
Destination Management Companies	4. ShearWater Company	-(Innovative, Institutional and Place-based leader) Has 20 sub companies, including accommodation, restaurants, travel and tours, helicopters, and overland trucks	11/22
	5. Wild Horizons	-(Innovative, Institutional and Place-based leader) Has 20 sub companies, including accommodation, restaurants, travel and tours, helicopters, and overland trucks	11/22
	6. Africa Travel Tours	- (Innovative and institutional entrepreneur) Has two sub-companies	11/22
Facilitatory institutions	7. Zimbabwe Tourism Authority		28/10
	8. Victoria Falls Tourist Information Center	- Institutional entrepreneur	11/22
	9. Rainforest Management	- Institutional entrepreneur	11/22
	10. Victoria Falls Tour Operators Association	- Place-based leader and Innovative entrepreneur	
Hotels	11. Rainbow Hotel Victoria Falls	- Innovative entrepreneur – 2 in travel and tours	29/10
	12. AZambezi River Hotel	- Innovative entrepreneur – 2 companies in travel and tours	24/11
	13. Victoria Falls Safari Hotel	- Innovative and institutional	25/11

	14. Elephant Hills Hotel Intercontinental	<i>entrepreneur</i> (6 sub companies)	25/11
Lodges	15. Ilala Lodge	- Innovative entrepreneur	11/22
	16. Premier Lodge	- Innovative and Institutional entrepreneur	11/22
	17. Pamusha Lodge	- Innovative entrepreneur	11/22
	18. Bayethe Lodges		11/22
Restaurants	19. Three Monkeys	- Innovative entrepreneur	11/22
	20. Lookout Restaurant	- Innovative entrepreneur	11/22
Ancillary/ upgrading services	21. Art Africa Craft Centre	- Innovative entrepreneur	11/22
	22. Shockwave Rafting	- Innovative entrepreneur	11/22
	23. Zambezi Helicopters	- Innovative entrepreneur	11/22
	24. Royal Linkages	- Innovative entrepreneur	11/22
Focus Group discussion	25. 5 local entrepreneurs picked from various sectors	- Innovative entrepreneur and two institutional entrepreneurs	11/22
	26. 5 Women in Crafts/ Sewing for Tourist Targeted goods- Partnership with City of Victoria Falls	- Innovative entrepreneurs	11/22

Table 10: Interviews and FDG in Kasane/ Botswana

Method	Name of business/ Industry	Location	Date
1. Interview	Kasane International Airport	Kasane	01/2023
2. Interview	District Commission	Kasane	01/2023
3. Interview	Botswana Tourism Association – Chobe District	Kasane	01/2023
4. Interview	Chobe Marina Hotel	Kasane	01/2023
5. Interview	Tour Guides Association of Botswana	Kasane	01/2023
6. Interview	Dep of Forests	Kasane	02/2023
7. Interview	Chobe Game Lodge	Kasane	02/2023
8. Interview	KAZA	Kasane	02/2023
9. Interview	Kasane Regional Council	Kasane	02/2023
10. Interview	Parks and Wildlife	Kasane	02/2023
11. Interview	Min of Youth	Kasane	02/2023
12. Interview	Kubu Lodge	Kasane	02/2023
13. Interview	Wild Africa Safari	Kasane	02/2023
14. Interview	Whobo Hanga	Kasane	02/2023
15. Interview	Water lilly lodge	Kasane	02/2023
16. Interview	Global Guest Lodge	Kasane	02/2023
17. Interview	Chobe Land board	Kasane	02/2023
18. Interview	Chobe Mopani	Kasane	02/2023
19. Interview	Thebe Safaris	Kasane	02/2023
20. Interview	Cresta Moana	Kasane	02/2023
21. Interview	Chobe Safari	Kasane	02/2023
22. Interview	CEDA	Kasane	02/2023
23. FDG	Tourism Business Actors	Kasane	02/2023

Table 11: Interview schedule -imaginaries/Alternative futures research

Method	Business / Industry	Location	Date
1. Interview	3 Palms Lodge	Katima	02/2024
2. Interview	MEFT	Katima	02/2024
3. Interview	Kolosi Lodge	Katima	02/2024
4. Interview	ZVTC	Katima	02/2024
5. Interview	Gondwana Lodges	Katima	07/2024
6. Interview	IRDC	Katima	07/2024
7. Interview	UNAM	Katima	02/2024
8. Interview	UNAM	Katima	07/2024
9. Interview	UNAM	Katima	07/2024
10. Interview	Parks and Wildlife	Katima	03/2024
11. Interview	Zambezi Council	Katima	07/2024
12. Interview	Katima Town Council	Katima	02/2024
13. FDG	Various players in Tourism in Zambezi	Zoom	07/2024
14. Interview	Historian	Zoom	07/2024
15. Interview	Donor Agency	Zoom	07/2024
16. Interview	WWF	Katima	02/2024
17. Interview	International Tourism Consultant	Katima	07/2024
18. Interview	PPF	Zoom	02/2024
19. Interview	SADC	Zoom	02/2024
20. Interview	IUCN	Zoom	02/2024
21. Interview	Professor of Conservation and Tourism	Zoom	02/2024
22. Interview	Chobe Land board	Kasane	02/2024
23. Interview	Chobe Mopani	Kasane	03/2024
24. Interview	CEDA	Kasane	03/2024
25. Interview	Local member of Council	Kasane	03/2024
26. Interview	Local Member of Parliament	Kasane	03/2024
27. Interview	Historian	Kasane	03/2024
28. Interview	Travel Agent	Kasane	07/2024
29. Interview	Botswana Tourism Association – Chobe District	Kasane	07/2024
30. Interview	National Archives Botswana	Kasane	07/2024
31. Interview	LEA- Botswana	Kasane	07/2024
32. Interview	Chobe Safari Lodges	Kasane	07/2024
33. Interview	Cresta Moana	Kasane	07/2024
34. Interview	Okavango Research Institute	Kasane	02/2024
35. Interview	University of Botswana	Kasane	03/2024
36. Interview	Kubu Lodge	Kasane	03/2024

37. Interview	KAZA	Kasane	07/2024
38. Interview	Kasane Regional Council	Kasane	07/2024
39. Interview	Chobe Game Lodge	Kasane	07/2024
40. Interview	Tour Guides Association of Botswana	Kasane	07/2024
41. Interview	Chobe National Park	Kasane	08/2024
42. Interview	Kazungula Bridge authority	Kasane	08/2024
43. Interview	City of Victoria Falls	Victoria Falls	08/2024
44. Interview	Shear Water Company	Victoria Falls	08/224
45. Interview	Wild Horizons	Victoria Falls	08/2024
46. Interview	Waybridge Management	Victoria Falls	08/2024
47. Interview	Victoria Falls Police	Victoria Falls	03/2024
48. Interview	Parks and Wildlife	Victoria Falls	03/2024
49. Interview	Kazungula Border Authority	Victoria Falls	08/2024
50. Interview	Zimbabwe Immigration	Victoria Falls	08/2024
51. Interview	Comesa Market	Victoria Falls	08/2024
52. FDG	Comesa Market	Victoria Falls	08/2024
53. Interview	Zambia Immigration	Livingstone	08/2024
54. Interview	City of Livingstone	Livingstone	08/2024
55. Interview	Livingstone Museum	Livingstone	08/2024
56. Interview	Min of Tourism	Livingstone	08/2024
57. Interview	Heartlands Company	Livingstone	08/2024
58. FDG	Out grower Farmer	Livingstone	08/2024
59. Interview	Protea Lodge	Livingstone	08/2024
60. Interview	Livingstone Tourism Association	Livingstone	08/2024
61. Interview	Livingstone Business Council	Livingstgone	08/2024
62. Interview	Livingstone Airport	Livingstone	08/2024
63. Interview	Royal Livingstone Hotel	Livingstone	08/2024
64. Interview	Historian -Academic	Livingstone	08/2024

FDGs and Key Information Interview guidelines

1. Place Based leaders Specific Questions?

Motivations, Goals and Risk-Taking Behavior

- Do you recall how the wildlife tourism business emerged in this region/ town?
- Could you walk me through this emergence over time focusing on the opportunities that existed and how they developed?
- What social, Cultural, political and economic conditions worked to create/ hinder the emergence of tourism opportunities?
- What policies do you think support(ed) the emergence of tourism opportunities and how?
- What policies hinder the emergence of tourism opportunities?
- Why did you enter into this business?
- What motivates/ motivated you to seek improvements/ change within the tourism sector?
- Are there other opportunities that you lost by focusing on this business? Explain
- Do you think this decision to focus on tourism went against the advice, norm at the time? Explain
- What did you hope to achieve with the work you undertake?
- What skills, training have you acquired that make you a better leader?
- Do you think the wild life tourism is a viable business/ sector? Explain?
- What is the future of this business?

Network Mobilization Strategies

- What challenges or resistance did you face in advocating/ starting a tourism business activity?
- Have these challenges changed over time and how?
- What strategies did you use to mobilize and coordinate others to participate in tourism advocacy or business?
- Who are the other persons/ institutions involved in tourism business/ change advocacy?
- How do you recruit them? What skills, competencies or resources do you consider?
- Are there platforms or spaces you have used to coordinate other leaders?
- How do you motivate or inspire other business actors/ leaders to remain engaged in this business?
- How would you classify these actors (local, regional and international)

Advocacy strategies

- In seeking policy/institutional change what strategies have you used for lobbying purposes?
- Have these strategies changed over time and how?
- Which of these strategies have been most successful and how?

- Who have been the targets of this advocacy?
- What has been their response?
- What has been the outcome of these efforts?
- What has been your role in the advocacy process?
- What would you say have been your major successes and failures?

Scale of efforts (local/ Regional)/ Shared vision

- What has been the spatial focus of your efforts (locally, regionally or internationally) and why?
- How do you reconcile individual interests with regional interests for tourism growth?
- How did you build and inspire a common vision with others who may have their individual ideas?
- Did you have a strategic plan/ vision written down or developed?
- In doing your work do you work mostly informally or through formal channels? Explain

2. Key Informant Interview – Tourism Path creation

Agent motivations, opportunities and Goals

- When was this company founded? What is its core mandate?
- What motivated you to form the company?
- What opportunities existed then that led to the formation of this company? Explain
- What challenges did you face in setting up the company?
- How did you deal with these challenges?
- What did you lose (in terms of business) by taking these opportunities?
- Did you face any opposition or go against the established business models in taking your business route/?
- Which individual or organisation was responsible for creating or influencing these opportunities? Explain
- Did any member of your family or society inspire you to take these opportunities? Explain?
- How have these opportunities changed over time?
- What have you done about these changes? Explain

Agent access of resources

- Did you /do you have access to any resources to support the establishment of your business (access to bank loans, skills training, eg support from government). Explain
- Have you received any support from your family? Explain
- How does the traditional leadership/ city council support your business?
- What are your expectations/vision about the future of wildlife tourism business in your region? Explain

- Do you see any future opportunities for business/ wildlife tourism growth in this region? What are these opportunities? Explain?
- What will you do to influence or take advantage of these opportunities? Explain
- What strategy did you employ to take advantage of the opportunities that led to you establishing your business? Explain
- How have these strategies changed over time?
- What would you say your company has done to contribute to the growth of tourism in this region? (Innovations)

Mapping the actors

- In your view, who are the leading actors in the tourism business? What are their roles?
- Who are the more powerful actors? Could you rank these actors in terms of power?
- How are these actors connected? Through what networks?

Agent Capabilities (education, years of experience in industry, years operating a business, size of and positionality within network, access of resources, expectations, strategy, size of business)

- Prior to setting up this business what did you do?
- Education and Professional Qualifications
- Do you have an educational qualification for which you received a certificate?
- Do you have a professional, vocational, business or any work-related qualification?
- How has this education/training prepared you for business/innovation in wildlife tourism?
- Years of Experience in the Industry/ Business
- For how many years has the business been in operation?
- In setting up this business, was this a one-off process, or were there instances of failure? Explain
- Which local institutions, businesses did you have to deal with/ convince/or pitch your ideas to for support?
- Do you belong to any political Party? How has this influenced your decisions and the growth of your business?
- How much profit do you make each year?
- When was this business/ Company formed?

Agent characteristics i.e. (Marital status, age, gender, race, ethnicity)

- What is your marital status?
- Please state your age group?
- What is your gender?
- What is your ethnicity?

3. FDG and Key Informant tool: Imaginaries Research

- Can you briefly describe your role and involvement in the KAZA initiative or tourism development in this region?
- How long have you been engaged in tourism-related work in this region, and in what capacities?
- In your understanding, how did the idea of KAZA as a transfrontier conservation and tourism area first emerge?
- What were the original motivations behind creating a unified tourism destination across national borders?
- Who were the key actors (governmental, non-governmental, regional bodies) involved in conceiving the KAZA tourism vision?
- To what extent was the KAZA vision influenced by regional, continental (e.g., AU Agenda 2063), or global (e.g., eco-tourism, green economy) future-oriented frameworks?
- What kind of future(s) did the proponents of KAZA imagine for tourism in this region? (e.g., economic growth, conservation-led development, borderless tourism)
- How have these imagined futures influenced actual planning and investment in tourism infrastructure (e.g., visa policies, transport, accommodation)?
- What institutional changes or coordination mechanisms were introduced to align tourism development with the KAZA vision?
- How have visa regimes like the Univisa contributed to or hindered the realisation of the KAZA tourism future?
- How have local communities been engaged in or affected by the imagined future of KAZA as a single tourism destination?
- What have been the major successes or milestones in aligning tourism development with the original KAZA vision?

Appendix B: Own Contribution

All three manuscripts (cf. Chapters 4 and 5) were co-authored with the supervisors of this dissertation, Prof. Dr. Javier Revilla Diez (primary supervisor) and Prof. Dr. Michael Bollig (both University of Cologne). The two are principal investigators for the CO1 project, which is part of the CRC Future Rural Africa CRC-TRR228. The article in Chapter 6 was co-authored by the two principal investigators, along with Dr. Lucas Rutina (University of Namibia) and Melusi Rampart (Botswana University of Agriculture and Natural Resources), who are project partners.

I have contributed to these three articles in the following way:

- Review of relevant literature
- Development of the conceptual frameworks in all three articles
- Development of the research design
- Selection of research methods
- Design of interview guidelines, sampling of interviewees, and conduct of interviews and focus group discussions
- Transcriptions of the voice-recorded interviews and cross-checking of transcriptions
- Conducting archival research at the Livingstone Museum and Gaborone National Archives
- Design of Research instruments: FDG and Key informant guideline protocols
- Data cleaning and analysis from all sources
- Conduction of qualitative content analysis
- Analysis of quantitative data using Excel from Tourism organisations and immigration departments
- Draft Maps and GIS analysis of tourism enterprises in Victoria Falls
- Independent writing of all manuscripts
- Revision of all manuscripts was done under the guidance of Prof. Dr. Javier Revilla Diez and Prof. Dr. Michael Bollig (all articles).

The data used for this dissertation are stored in the central database of the Collaborative Research Centre 228, “Future Rural Africa”: <https://www.trr228db.uni-koeln.de/site/index.php>. Due to confidential agreements, the primary research data is not publicly accessible, but can be requested at any time. Referencing styles in Chapters 4, 5, and 6 follow the publisher's guidelines.