

ECAS 2013

5th European Conference on African Studies (Lisbon)

June
27-29



African Dynamics in a Multipolar World

ISCTE - Lisbon University Institute

ECAS 2013

5th European Conference on African Studies

African Dynamics in a Multipolar World

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ISBN: 978-989-732-364-5

TOURISM AS INTERACTION OF LANDSCAPES

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Abstract

The Swahili society on Lamu Island has a thousand year history of contacts with other cultures through trade and shipping but today tourism is the gateway to interaction between people from various backgrounds. This paper discusses the residents' adaption to and conceptualization of the transformations in their envisaged and experienced landscape as a result of tourism. The work focuses on the socio-cultural consequences and is based on observations and interviews during 2009-2010 in Lamu Island. The analysis shows that the interaction gives certain effects such as an accentuation of tensions already existing in the society. Tourism presence also creates the evolvement of a more explicit moral landscape. Tourism participation indicates the importance of functional institutions to achieve sustainable development.

Keywords: Lamu, Swahili culture, landscape, tourism, moral landscape, sustainable tourism



“Tourism is about people travelling in order to expand their experiential, imaginary, and ideological landscapes. Yet, it is also about the effects this form of travelling has on the landscapes of the communities receiving the travelers. Given the exchange of perspectives that is involved in these multifaceted encounters, tourism can be analyzed as an interaction of landscapes” (The Other Side of ‘Nature’, Larsen 2000:199).

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Introduction

The kidnappings of two European women in Lamu's close surroundings 2011 have entirely reshaped the touristic landscape. Over a night, after the second abduction, the hope of a fully booked season was disappearing. Ministries of Foreign Affairs worldwide banned Lamu as an unsafe place and warned their citizens to travel here. The catches were interpreted as Al shabaab's attack on Kenya as a state and specifically on its tourism attractions. Kenya answered by a military invasion into southern Somalia.

Lamu became 'empty and quiet'. Not only all tourist left, also immigrated guest workers had to leave since they suddenly had a nonpaid vacation. Likewise some locals left in search for earning their living somewhere else. The 'new landscape' was beside the resident people inhabited by policemen and other armed forces who tried to keep safety and protect from new attacks. Depending on various reasons, tourism has during later years become the main income generating activity in Lamu and like in many other tourist places, tourism has its low and its high seasons and people know how to prepare and to save for down periods. But this time the *no season* came totally by surprise and the crises showed how vulnerable the society has become.

The presentation at ECAS 2013 under Panel 134: *Tourist mobilities in contemporary Africa* was based on research conducted for a licentiate thesis at the Department of Social and Economic Geography at Uppsala University during 2009-2010. The thesis is available in full text at:

<http://uu.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?searchId=1&pid=diva2:440444>

This article includes a short comment based on the new conditions after October 2011.

A short geographical and historical background

The Lamu Archipelago is a cluster of seven main, and a number of small uninhabited islands, situated in The Indian Ocean on the northern Kenyan coast. The climate is equatorial-coastal characterized by high tropical temperature, high humidity, pronounced rainy seasons and monsoon winds. The area is fringed with sheltering coral reefs and is to a great degree lined with mangrove forests. The coast has a number of natural ports to which sailing ships with traders and explorers came by following the monsoons and from 600 AD the East African Coast area has been a part of the commercial system of the Indian Ocean (Kiriamu 2005). Arab traders settled in the area from the 9th century and inter-married with the local people and Islam was mostly peacefully and gradually introduced in the area. The indigenous people developed their own individual Islamic culture, keeping a lot of their African beliefs and combining them with the new religion, the mix of different civilizations created a new culture and language, Swahili. Even with intensive contacts by trade and travel as well as invasions by Arabs, Europeans and Africans, the Swahili people have over the centuries kept their own cultural identity. A great number of ancient, coastal settlements can be found along the Swahili coast with retained evidence of a highly evolved urban culture but most of them are abandoned since the 17th century.

Lamu Island covers an area of 50 km². The topography varies from undulating flats composed of lagoonal deposits and fossil coral reefs, to hilly sand dunes up to 65m high. Lamu Island is fringed by mangroves forests along a large section of its coast and Lamu town has a good natural harbor which is protected from the open ocean by Manda Island. Because of the sandy soil very few crops can be cultivated so most of the food is imported from the mainland. Population census 2009 showed that there are around 25 000 inhabitants on the island.

Lamu town dates back to the 12th century, it is the oldest of the Swahili settlements and retains more of its original character and has survived physical destruction better than any other on the whole East African coast. Lamu can be classified as an 'antique living city'; the old town is unique and is a rare historical living heritage with more than 700 years of continuous settlement. Its origin was due to trade and it was developed by indigenous people (UNESCO). Thanks to the good relationship with the Omani rulers who established the sultanate of Zanzibar in 1840, Lamu grew into a busy trade center during the 19th century. Their dhows were trading in ivory, mangroves and other items over the Indian Ocean, where the most important part was the slave trade. The establishment of an organized state in Zanzibar was responsible for a great increase in the number of slaves exported to Arabia and the plantation economy in Zanzibar also demanded a lot of slaves as working force. Lamu was excluded from the worldwide limitations in export of slaves from 1873 and could continue with slave markets longer than any other place along the coast (Ghaidan 2007).

At the end of the 19th century the colonial interest from Europe more and more was directed towards the interior of the African continent and the monsoon-based trade was no longer enough to ensure continued growth in welfare of the Swahili towns. The embargo on slave labor on the plantations stopped the slave trade and the output of agricultural products and the whole area entered a phase of decline. The Kenya-Uganda railway, opened in 1901, focused most of the trade to the southern coast with Mombasa as the main port and Lamu was pushed aside. Today the island has an isolated geographical position which affects the development compared to other tourism sites along the Kenyan coast and the isolation is in fact important as it helps to preserve its uniqueness. The traditional livelihood with mangrove timberwork and fishing have during

later years been afflicted with strong restrictions so tourism, though on a small scale, has become the main source of income.

Tourism at the Swahili Coast

As Smith (1989) points out, tourism is only one of the forces that generate change and it is difficult to separate its consequences from other transforming forces. In the area of East African Coast the number of tourists and connected activities has risen during later years so there are reasons to expect that also the impacts from tourism have become more obvious. The Kenya coast experience considerable pressure on the physical environment today from growing population combined with expanding tourism (Tole 2000). Compared to other parts of the country the potential in terms of agriculture, mining and other economic activities as well as infrastructure is poorly endowed and poorly developed (Foeken 2000). The coastal tourism also faces a lot of problems with the physical infrastructure such as roads, electricity, water supplies, lack of sewage systems and solid waste disposal, but nevertheless there are plans and hope for an enlarged tourism sector in the region. Tourism is a significant activity on Kenya's coast but its contribution to development and poverty reduction in the region is surprisingly small. Many of the large tourist enterprises are owned, managed and controlled by foreign or national interest with little participation by the indigenous people. This could be explained by the specific development of tourism in the area. It started with Europeans from Kenya's interior regions and continued by foreign tourists visiting the beaches on all-inclusive packaged tours from the mid-1960s. Coastal tourism was not planned by the locals or integrated in the local economy. Part of the explanation is that the Waswahili population and the Muslim representation in the Kenya government is relatively small which makes it difficult to successfully challenge government on matters of tourism policy. Some avoid working with tourists, especially in hotels, because the

Islamic culture tends to associate tourism with immorality and it is estimated that 60% of the hotel workers on the coast come from up-country communities (Sindiga 2000). Some objections include the superficial presentation of culture for tourist consumption and the creation of socio-economic change in the Muslim towns (ibid). It is also obvious that tourist lifestyles tend to accentuate the dramatic differences between foreign affluence and local poverty and values. Both Lamu in Kenya and Zanzibar in Tanzania are presented as far-off island paradises with sentiments of the bygone, symbols of exoticism, former grandeur and affluence. Larsen (2000) discusses what role Western tourism in Zanzibar, which is in many respects similar to Lamu, will have for the delineation of local aesthetics and lifestyles and if it may lead to a change in the landscape. Zanzibar has, just like Lamu, for centuries been a cosmopolitan society but today local people are forced to confront, with increasing frequency of the tourist industry. The local people's perceptions of landscapes, organization of space and ways of life are affected by the tourism activities. The question arises whether the tourist globalization will neutralize the previous Islamization and Orientalization and that we will find that tourism will, with its westernized demands, corrode both the African and the Oriental legacies in the area (Mazrui 2000). Or will tourism instead lead to a more conscious effort to preserve old values and what consequences will that have? Lamu's spatial location makes it both a potential entry point into the interior and a critical barrier against the radical Islamist forces gaining strength across the border in Somalia (Jamal 2010). The Lamu society has historically propagated a mature and non-violent Islamic religious culture, but the geographical location with extremist religious ideologies flourishing in the region could be a disadvantage and the history of cross-culture interaction with tolerance and mutual understanding could be threatened.

In Lamu Island it has been a rapid growth in the economy from tourism paralleled with increased investments in tourist facilities followed by an increase in property values and a growing number of foreign investors. At the same time there has been a growing awareness of the importance of environmental issues and conservation of culture within the society. Inappropriate tourism development results in increasing stress on the destination which leads to negative changes in the physical, economic and the socio-cultural characteristics (Kabiru 2009). In Lamu District Development Plan from 2008, it is said that the district will embark on conservation of bio- diversity and promotion of eco-tourism, develop infrastructure in the tourist areas, intensify security to curb banditry activities and poaching and generally promote tourism industry through publicity using the Tourism Board. In Lamu district there is potential for tourism development with natural as well as cultural attractions but those will not be fully exploited if tourism is not promoted. The Development plan expresses expectations of increased employment in a wide range of areas such as hotel and lodges, land and air transport, boating activities, tourist guides and vending of traditional handicrafts if only tourism promotion works well. There is also stated that tourism is a multi-dimensional industry that to a great extent relies on other sectors and its linkages are wide ranging from environmental issues, transport, communication, agriculture, hospitality services, culture and business. If the sector is properly developed and nurtured it should be able to contribute to the growth of all the sectors in the district (Lamu District Development Plan, 2008). The New Constitution for Kenya accepted in May 2010 and to be fully implemented after the national elections in March 2013 may give rise to a greater autonomy for the coast area which is eagerly asked for by the Swahili population.

The Lamu landscape

Mitchell (1996) raises the question if material items in the landscape do reflect the “culture” of a place and people and if it even is so that landscape could determine the culture. In *New Axioms for reading the Landscape* (2008) he develops the question and says that landscape is power because it determines what can and what cannot be done, the landscape’s materiality shapes individual and social behavior, practices and processes. He means that the shape of the land has the power to shape social life. To relate this to Lamu we can agree on that without the physical conditions in Lamu with the blue waves of the Indian Ocean, the mangrove forests and the tropical climate the historical expansion in the area would never have occurred and without the past conditions the tourism of today would never have developed. But no landscape is only local (Mitchell 2008) and a landscape cannot be studied only in relation to its nearby surroundings; other forces are working elsewhere but can affect the local landscape. Specific narratives of history are constructed which posit a particular relationship between past, present and future. When a spirit of locality is appealed to it, it could be harmonious or antagonistic to others at local, regional, national or global scales (Matless 1998).

For many tourists the main reason to visit Lamu is the Swahili culture, still lively and an important part of everyday life: the tasty kitchen, the specific architecture and furniture, the typical style of boats and its festivals. Lamu has long remained the center of Islamic scholarship and religion in East Africa and the Maulidi Festival celebrating The Prophet’s birth draws Muslim pilgrims from many countries. The Cultural Festival held every November since 2000, exposing traditions and heritage attracts visitors both from the neighboring areas and from abroad. Besides this “exotic culture” Lamu offers pleasant beaches and an interesting nature life with turtles, mangroves and sea life.

Visually, the tourism activities are well integrated in the local society. There are no huge tourist establishments with all-inclusive hotels and no mass-tourism charter trips. The tourists move to a great extent in the same surroundings as the local people do. In spite of a low number of visitors (probably around 20 000 per year, no reliable statistics are available) and a limited season (mainly December to April) almost all households depend directly or indirectly on tourism.

Tourists tour, consume, and represent landscapes, places and cultures that have been produced, presented, and represented through tourism marketing. The presentation and promotion of Lamu Island in TV-programs, travel magazines, tourist guidebooks or brochures today transform Lamu into an exotic dream for the tourists/visitors/outsideers where the inhabitants are just a part of the view, most often even invisible. In the following part are just a few gleanings from tourist presentations on Lamu to illustrate this:

In Lamu, history and modern life are inextricably linked. The community has learned the value of its history, and the importance of traditions and customs. The values, beliefs and way of life throughout the islands are all a part of rich culture that grew and expanded with the sprawling stone town at the heart of the archipelago. (Lamu, Where History Lives. Magical Kenya)

Lamu is a place like no other, a peaceful tropical island where life is lived at its own relaxed rhythm, but a place whose history is as mysterious and fascinating as the winding streets of its medieval stone town.

The island itself is a beautiful place of rolling dunes and endless beaches, where tiny villages nestle among coconut and mango plantations and lateen sailed dhows ply the waters. (www.magicalkenya.com , 2010-09-14)

These texts can be regarded as important tools for different cultural brokers but there are reasons to seek the underlying message and explore how these texts work as determinants of space; whose views are these? Insiders or outsiders? The picturesque presentation itself privileges the observer over the dweller and the visitor over the occupier (Read 2008). Mitchell (2002) argues that in the world of the picturesque view, labor is fixed, as a subject of representation, while the

viewer is mobile and this reinforces the division between insiders and outsiders. Wylie (2007) notices that the differences between tourists and inhabitants are obvious; the outsiders/tourists/researchers are *mobile*, moving in and out of the landscape as they like while the locals are *immovable* both in time and space. The tourists are *observing* the landscape while the residents *inhabit* it and this gives different basis in the interpretation of the relationship humans– landscape.

Mingay (1989) examines the rural idyll in England and how the key elements in it are selectively represented. The work recounts the changing perceptions of dwellers and observers and a conclusion is that each generation seeks what they want to see in the land. It could be nostalgic traces of the rustic past and romantic beauty or focus on despoiled landscapes with brutal intrusions of modernization. In the place promotional texts from Lamu the idealistic myths as connected with the rural English idyll also here dominate: an impression of timelessness, an emphasis on traditional values, harmonious relations between nature and culture and an absence of social problems.

The description of Lamu is only partial; the tourist brokers produce perspectives and images that are supposed to attract potential tourists. How is the perspective from the resident's side expressed? History *does* matter (Mitchell 2008), both the everyday history and extraordinary events influence the possibilities in the future. When we study landscape we need to learn to look at it, to ask the correct questions and to read it. When we are able to do this, the landscape becomes a clue to culture. Every landscape is an act of purpose and was produced for some functional reasons. Landscape “is a relation of power, an *ideological* rendering of spatial relations” (Mitchell 1996).

Landscape is the spatial form that social justice takes (Mitchell 2008) and social justice is about human rights. Lamu town is built by slaves. The preexisting economic power and relations that the tradesmen had, the slaves they had on the plantations as well as in the city, and the influences they got from India, Arabia and other places all together founded today's landscape. The 'grandeur past' with its unfair conditions hundreds of years ago shaped the World Heritage that tourists can visit and enjoy today. For the tourists, landscape appreciation is often restricted to a visual evaluation of scenery, ignoring the multi-sensory nature of human landscape experience and ignoring the process of change which has created the landscape as a legacy of past ecological conditions and changing human values, and not thinking about that it will continue to change in the future (Read 2008).

Lowenthal (2008) says that 'Landscapes achieve beauty only when enlivened by hoary human history' and an archaeological and historical landscape, like Lamu, is loaded with reflective nostalgia; it sustains the dream of harmonious, organic connection between a locality and its community (Cosgrove 2006). Social and environmental change, progress and improvement are seen as a threat to inherited tradition and values and leads to raised claims for preservation, protection, conservation and sustainability. The question is whose interests should be prioritized? Is it conservation and maintenance for tourism or is it functional environment for the locals that should have precedence?

Investigating and interpreting landscapes

To achieve sustainable tourism in a certain area it is necessary to pay attention to the inhabitants' feelings and set of values. Hall & Page (1999) stresses that the residents' attitudes towards tourism must be regarded in the light of their personal gains from the developing process

and their response to the changing environment. The pre-existing values and attitudes and knowledge from their perspective are still lacking and Ondicho (2003:6) writes in an article about Tourism Development in Kenya: 'Ideally, an effort to find out the present conditions, problems and perspectives in Kenya's tourism industry requires fieldwork in the country.'

With this background my intention was to explore and understand the indigenous peoples' point of view with respect to the impacts of tourism, though I am aware of the circumstance that it is difficult to come as an outsider with this ambition and only have the possibility to stay a short time in the area. Beside semi-structured interviews I have as a part of my investigation spent a lot of time just moving around and participated in the daily life and as well as at special occasions which gave me essential information about daily life, common concerns and current discussions in the society. Wylie points in his book *Landscape* (2007) at the difficulties that an outsider researcher faces. To access the inhabitants' point of view the researcher must not only theorize landscape via corporeal dwelling, but also come to know the landscape through participating in it with his or her whole body. Narrowly observational field science misses the everyday textures of living and being in a landscape. There is a tension or gap between observing and inhabiting, between critical interpretation and phenomenological engagement that is difficult to reconcile as an outsider (Wylie 2007). Lowenthal (2008) means that awareness of the landscape involves active participation, how we understand the landscape depends on our physical interaction in it. Landscapes change as we move through them and cultural traditions cause differences in our interpretation.

The coming parts attempt to let the locals inhabitants in Lamu express their meaning about tourism's impacts and consequences for their everyday lives and to find out whether they

regard tourism as a threat or help to achieve a sustainable development within the landscape of their own.

‘To get in touch is a blessing’

Lamu’s history as tourist resort is short compared to the general history of the place. Lamu people tell with pride that for centuries Lamu has been a cultural meeting place for many different civilizations and that inhabitants from this island always have been travelers; they learned new things through their journeys that opened their eyes. Lamu citizens worked as tradesmen and received visitors from all over the Indian Ocean, they intermarried with other people and by and by a multicultural society developed as a mosaic of African and Arabic components. All these contacts have left impressions in language, culture, traditions, medicine and religion. One of my informants said that the new force of change is tourism and the question is what lasting marks tourism will leave. He thought that tourism will disappear, just like all the other visiting or ruling civilizations, maybe leaving some traces, but Lamu will remain. Another man argued that without tourism Lamu should be “nothing” today:

‘Tourism has brought new life to this place, it was completely dead during 300 years from the 17th century to the 1960s, but tourism brought economic life back again, and there is absolutely development in tourism!’

The first tourists in Lamu arrived during the 1960s when the first hotels were established but the number of tourists was very low. Several informants told me that it was really something of an adventure to come here; Lamu was at the end of a very bad, terrible road, no airlines were operating; it was something out of the ordinary and an incredible place. Some visitors were ‘extraordinary and famous people’, but many were young people studying the Swahili language

and culture and stayed in private homes. The place was so attractive to some early visitors that they have returned and settled and become residents. Later on came more of the ‘one-dollar-a-day-travelers’, the hippies, mainly from America. Older Lamu people talk with nostalgia about the visitors during the 60s and 70s and they mean that tourism today is very different. Tourism was more interactive earlier; many local families could make a part of their living by dividing up their house into a simple guesthouse with low rate. The women made food in their kitchen which their children or husbands sold to foreigners in town. Everything was cheap, tourism was not a market then and the local people regarded it as an honor to have tourists as guests. From Islam you learn that to get in touch is a blessing which benefits all. Lamu was a very small town and the visitors were well observed, all their movements were noticed and they were afraid of doing something wrong. Most of them respected the local culture and way of dressing, behaved in a proper way and attended local activities. ‘It was *respect* between the two - the locals and the tourists - and the relationship was mostly good.’

‘Tourism is like a knife’

But ‘Lamu wasn’t a playschool where everything was peace and love’. During quite a long period during the 1970s there was an appeal in Lamu with discourse lectures towards the foreigners and tourism as phenomena. Tourism became connected with immoral behavior such as naked swimming and people were accusing tourists for spreading dirt and waste and destroying in general. In 1976 all foreigners were taken to court accused for something such as espionage or drug handling. Those who could not produce appropriate travel documents were forced to leave the island immediately. Also during the 1980s there was a similar movement but today the local people want those incidents to be forgotten.

Today's tourists are mainly rich, upper-class visitors, and Chinese and Japanese are the newest groups. Some fly in for just a few days while others return repeatedly for three weeks every year. Some even come to settle, which has increased the prices for land and houses. In Shela, situated 3 km from Lamu town, around 70% of the private properties are owned by foreigners, mainly Europeans. Some of them are not well seen because they do not take part in the community life, do not take responsibility for common issues and do not contribute with money or by offering work opportunities. Both community and tourism are threatened by the selfishness of people with money, some of the interviewees argue. Nowadays it is all about tourism and the language of money; even neighbors who earlier were the first persons to one another expect to be paid for favors today. The threat is not tourism in itself; it is money and overdevelopment. The community has come into a dependency relationship with tourists, and the tourists should take their responsibility and donate money:

An elder man expressed the dilemma:

'Tourism is like a knife, it has its good and its bad sides; it is a matter of how the whole thing is handled, the economic side shouldn't be overlooked but when a community is poor it is more difficult to handle it.'

'A message to visitors'

'People from outside are welcome here if they put things right!' Many of the interviewed people express the same feeling, they are not against tourists –on the contrary foreign tourism has been a blessing in Lamu - but tourists are welcome on certain conditions. One old man explained: -'People should stay together; we are all from Adam and Eve and Islam teaches about

respect for others. Most of the tourists who come here want to get a feeling of this area, the culture and traditions, they come not for destroying or influence or disrupt, but sometimes they are not knowledgeable'. Another man stressed that the local people do not want to interfere with foreigners who do not accept the common way of behavior and do not pay respect. An important part of Lamu identity is joy in life and pride; a Swahili person is carrier of something special but Lamu people are no good at fighting for their own sake. Locals are tolerant but they do not want to be exposed and so many tourists have 'low culture'. Many foreign women dress badly, one girl told me that the local women use to laugh at them behind their backs.

Some of the interviewed persons told me that they keep away from certain areas because they consider them destroyed by foreign influence because the big immigration with working staff from other parts of the country with different traditions and habits and places that are connected directly with tourism activities, such as bars, restaurants and the beach. One woman told me that when she has guests from other places she feels sad and ashamed of the change that Lamu town has undergone. She has a hard time to plan where she can take guests so that they do not need to see "the disaster". Others told me that when they are fed up with all the foreigners they go deep into the winding alleys in the Old town where no tourists can find their way, or they lock themselves in at home. The traditional houses are built to secure privacy which is an important part of Swahili culture. The Islamic religion is an important part of everyday life for Lamu people but the interviews give a disparate view on the role of religion. Many stressed that it was not any problem with all the different religions represented by the tourists or the Christian churches that have appeared as a result of the immigration. In contrast to that one informant meant that threats from tourism are connected with religion; religions can exist side by side but not mix and the insult the locals feel depends on the visitor's disrespect for Islam. Another

interviewee meant that today's threat against the culture does not come from tourism but from the religious people. Reformist Islam does not regard the Swahili culture as pure faithful to Islam. The Culture Festival held every November since 2000 is an attempt to show and strengthen the local Swahili culture, not for tourists in the first place, but for the local population to make them aware of its uniqueness.

'The spoiled boys'

Some informants do not want to associate specific problems with tourism at all while others mean that although tourism brings work opportunities to the community and foreign currency to the country, the disadvantages is greater such as rising prices, bribes, limited accessibility for locals to beaches and other areas and an immoral lifestyle. 'The little the locals get from tourism is actually a loss if the young boys are getting addicted to drugs and get spoiled.' Many people in Lamu are worried about the high level of school dropouts. The decision to leave school could have different backgrounds but are mostly economic and it is still common for girls to marry early and leave school. Even if they would like to get a higher education it is difficult for several reasons to continue. College and high school are very expensive and you must move because there are no such education facilities in the district. Some of the younger male informants told me that they had envied other young friends' leisured life and after secondary school, some even after primary, felt like 'my head is full' and they thought they already had got education enough. 'In our grandfathers' time' young men used to learn from the elder by working together with them, and there is no tradition of higher schooling in Lamu. There are few opportunities to get jobs at an advanced level so if you invest in a university degree it will probably lead to that your permanent move from here.

Many young Lamu boys are content with staying home with their families and friends and enjoy the leisured coastal life, they do not want to be employed, they want to have their freedom. These young men make money for their families in the tourist business so therefore it is difficult to criticize their attitude. A common opinion is that they are good boys at heart but they get spoiled by their interaction with the tourists. When they start to work with foreigners they often leave religion and the consequence will also be that they are not reached by the education and information that is given in the Mosque about community issues. There are also many young men who come here from other places along the coast seeking for jobs on a freelance basis. So we have got a generation of beach boys who hang around with tourists offering guiding, information about accommodation, crafts for sale, snorkeling tours, friendship, sex services and drugs. And for all these services they expect payment; those are what people call ‘the spoiled boys’.

‘You can never be from here if you not are from here’

The Lamu people has a love and hate relationship with tourists and newcomers. On one hand the visitors and new settlers bring money and development, on the other hand the foreigners could disturb the balance in this small community. The locals fear the outsiders, no matter if they are tourists or have become residents, because if they bring their own culture here it can overtake the local lifestyle. Therefore it is important to make clear distinctions between who belongs to this place and who is not.

I have met some residents who have moved to Lamu long time ago, some are married to local people, some are of Swahili origin but from other places, they all speak Swahili, take part in community work and so on, but they feel that they are still regarded as outsiders and it will

always be that way. One of the Swahili-born people who have lived here all life articulated the issue:

“We identify people depending on where they come from. We don’t have problems with for instance luo or giriama people but they don’t belong here. We respect somebody who takes fully part in community activity and we appreciate all support. If they do not really help or get involved they are not regarded as good members.”

Some of my interviewees stressed the fact the Swahili culture is filled with pride: ‘This is what God gave us’ and people regard themselves as ‘above and special’. Lamu has a specific position in religion and the culture and language is pure in its traditional form and they are carriers of the great history of this place. It is the locals’ responsibility to preserve this heritage; they will not adopt or bend. ‘This is both their strength and their weakness’ one immigrant said. Today they feel discriminated by the Kenyan government and the kikuyu population, threatened by internet and mobile phones and misunderstood by newcomers and tourists who do not realize Lamu’s specific value. Therefore boundaries between the pure and original on one side and the new influences on the other side are important. This is expressed in many different ways; dress and adornment is one and defending traditions and privacy is another.

All hotel keepers I interviewed and the representatives from the museum had an ambition and a vision that their establishment should function as a contact zone and meeting point between locals and visitors, between different kind of visitors and even between different groups in the resident society. One even mentioned the dream of Lamu being a melting pot where a lot of cultural expressions could be mixed together into a new form of way of life, an innovation. Lamu can sustain its identity *through* tourism instead of regarding the contacts as threats against the traditional values and habits. If tourism could be a matter of cultural exchange it should be an improvement.

TOURISM AS INTERACTION OF LANDSCAPES

Opportunities and obstacles on the way to Sustainable tourism development

Tourism has many inherent paradoxes and in Lamu it represents both continuity and change. Tourism is built on the old heritage and a magnificent history in combination with a rich but sensitive tropical landscape; all of this must be protected, preserved and well maintained for various reasons. One concern is to be able to sustain and develop tourism itself and how to combine economic growth with the desire to preserve a certain kind of landscape values.

Besides resting on the continuity of the specific cultural and natural landscape tourism also represents one of many transforming forces. Tourists are not a homogenous group, nor are the residents; different lifestyles, demands and values meet and the locals are affected in different ways, practically and mentally, attracted or repelled. From my investigation there are mainly three noticeable consequences that points on the tensions in the Lamu people's envisaged and experienced landscape caused by the interaction with tourism:

- The accentuation of the differences already existing in the society.
- The evolvement of an explicit moral landscape.
- The highlighting of the need of functional institutions and strategies for sustainable development.

The accentuation of the differences already existing in the society

The interaction with tourism underlines the differences which already exist between women and men and between generations and could be an obstacle to a sustainable development for the tourism business but also for the society on the whole. Plans for expanding cultural tourism with home stays, Swahili cooking and teaching the language and about traditions must

also involve women. But further tourist development with increased interaction with foreign people could be regarded as a threat to family ties and traditional values and may widen the gap between the groups further. The meeting points and contact zones between locals and tourists are important for their mutual understanding but only a small share of the population interacts and mingles with the tourists. These circumstances create a gap within the host community, both between the sexes and between generations. There is a tradition of keeping women out of sight of unfamiliar men and a fear about what will happen to them if they interact with strangers, while men of all ages interact with tourists daily. Even if not all men work in the tourism business they will meet strangers in the town square, along the seafront or in the streets, they wish them welcome and make contacts.

Young men who drop out from school to earn their living as boat staff, guides or salesmen have tight contacts with the visitors. Some of them are attracted to the westernized way of life that is in so many ways different from the traditional Swahili way of living with its close connection to Islam. They are evident examples of how individuals can choose to vary their identity depending on the situation. Together with their relatives they manifest the Swahili identity as loving husbands, caring fathers and faithful Muslims. Together with tourists they instead emphasize their leisured lifestyle, willingness to interact and make friends with foreigners, a “modern lifestyle” with use of alcohol and drugs and a free sex life. By their families and society they are regarded as “spoiled boys” but the lifestyle is (to some extent) sanctioned because they earn the main part of the family’s income.

There is an increasing acceptance, especially among young people, for women to work outside the home for economic reasons but they are strongly controlled and they need to defend their position towards the elder generation. Among the young women it has been a movement

towards more active school participation with high ambitions and an evolving more conservative view of marriage and dressing. The specific and consequently accomplished wearing with buibui and nicab, they draw up the visible, and stress the invisible boundaries towards other groups in the society but also in relation to visitors.

The evolvement of an explicit moral landscape

As stressed in the European Landscape convention, landscape is crucial for social wellbeing and encompasses a variety of values. Landscape can be seen as an expression of natural and cultural heritage and the foundation for identity. The tourists' expectations on the landscape they are visiting, as conveyed by advertisements and place promotion information, are affecting also the residents place perceptions. People have come from all over the world paying a lot of money to spend their leisure time in this particular location. It is taken as a proof that this landscape is desirable even for outsiders and something out of the ordinary. Among the inhabitants it is common to talk about Lamu as 'Jannat' (Paradise), a place that has been given to them by God and this is most often reinforced by the reactions of the guests. The locals' identities are shaped by the landscape they inhabit, with its imbedded values but also in by relationships with the world around them. Few of my informants among the local population have been international travelers themselves or have internet access; their main outside influences (beside television) are on a personal basis with the visitors who come here. But identities are not made or fixed once and for all; they are in a continuous change. As an individual you can purposely choose to express various parts of your identity depending on the situation, but circumstances can also force you to reconsider your identity. If the reinforcement the residents get from outsiders about the superiority of this unique place and its charming

people will diminish, for instance by declining numbers of visitors or the absence of positive response caused by a changed landscape and environmental degradation, it will also affect their identity formation. One informant even expressed the fear that with education and an increasing consciousness about the outer world Lamu would not be the same and may therefore lose its attraction. What I have seen is a change influenced by tourism, although not in the expected, visible way, it is a more unconscious and underlying transformation. An example of this is that a new moral landscape emerges where distinctions between insiders and outsiders are articulated. The tourists' assets, behaviors and culture are not seen as an example of something desired, instead it is often regarded with skepticism and considered to be examples of low culture and a lack of awareness of codes of conduct. The indigenous Swahili people want to emphasize their inherited customs and values and they generally regard themselves as having higher standards compared to both tourists and the temporary working staff from the mainland. They express a desire to educate and train the visitors to observe proper manners and thereby establish good relations and reciprocal benefits.

The highlighting of the need of functional institutions and strategies for sustainable development

The dissatisfaction among Lamu citizens with people in higher and decision making positions of other origins than Swahili reflects a broader problem. The educational level among the Swahili people is still low, not many have taken university degrees and returned to their place of origin. There is a lack of skilled local labor for this kind of jobs and to avoid corruption the Kenya government is unlikely to post people in their place of origin. The distance to Nairobi is

immense, both geographically and emotionally, so the dubiousness towards edicts from the government is pronounced. The local suspiciousness against outsiders also has another reason. Decision-making approaches often ignore the emotional dimension of value system, and instead seek to make decisions by means of rational models. This approach fails to deal adequately with the complex feelings, perceptions, and meanings inherent in people's relationship to the environment and places in which they live and work (Schroeder 2008), what Massey & Jess (2003) call a tendency to 'landscape' cultural identity. In Lamu mythical landscapes, inherited traditions, ceremonies and stories define the cultural heritage and preservation of all this and pride in it is regarded of high importance, higher than reformations that from an outside perspective may seem objectively and measureable the most appropriate. The outsiders do not seem to understand what is really important and valuable for the insiders, their 'landscapes of the mind'.

Not only the low number of Swahili persons in higher positions but also the undersized number of locally owned tourist establishments is a problem if the local community wants to have influence and take control over the tourism business and its impacts on the island. Due to escalating land prices more and more residents are selling their properties to foreigners who use them for private leisure houses or small hotel businesses managed by outsiders. If the relationship between Lamu residents and the visitors change, the identity for them will also change; the Lamu people are transferred to tenants and the foreigners are the landlords who decide the conditions. In an ambition to influence this undesirable transformation the National Museums of Kenya have plans to develop a program in connection with UNESCO among young people in Lamu to strengthen their awareness of culture and heritage. The aim is to get more

young people engaged and develop their ability to participate in the tourism industry in leading positions and in a purposeful way.

Compared to other tourist destinations along the Kenyan coast, and especially compared to nearby Manda Island which has been radically transformed during the last few years by tourist establishments, the Lamu environment has remained basically unchanged. It has also been unaffected by the negative consequences of mass tourism. The Lamu guesthouses are small and mostly accommodated in traditional Swahili houses, small scale cultural and eco-friendly tourism has actively been promoted and the visitors move in the same areas and use the same modes of transportation as the inhabitants.

Weaver (2004) calls sustainable development an elusive term and the commonly accepted definition of sustainable development given by the WCED report from 1987 and the more recent one formulated by Swarbrooke (1999) about sustainable tourism are both wide and can inspire to multiple, selective interpretations. Questions on what resources should be sustained and for whom and what is sustainable for local cultures and economies are all loaded with power issues and the answers are not derived directly from the impacts but from the social, economic and political practices and discourses in every case. The relationship between tourism and other complex systems that have no immediate or obvious linkage with tourism must be considered. The desired goals and conditions in a particular place must be defined, as well as what sustainability means and entails in the local context and how it should be achieved and evaluated. One weakness in models for explaining and predict sustainable tourism development is that they suggest a homogenous host community. More often than not there are different reactions within the community which is clearly shown in the case of Lamu.

If the local community wants to minimize the costs and maximize the benefits they gain from tourism they need to be active players in the tourism market. A main problem has been the lack of functional institutions and sharp strategies for tourism development and an unawareness of consequences of tourism involvement. To achieve a sustainable tourism improvement a pronounced engagement from the local society is necessary and from the restricted point of view define what is important and desirable in this specific framework. The key competitive factors and needed innovations must be identified and the means by which both the private and public sector can improve capacity building and investments. Effective communication methods and resolute tourism promotion must be developed. To encourage a sustainable development it must be recognized how further expansion of tourism can work in fair and inclusive ways, be environmentally and social responsible and benefit the local community, both preserving the environment and heritage and contributing to poverty alleviation in the region. Sustainability ought to be regarded as a *direction* rather than a *status* and be used as tools in tourism development and an ideal to continually work towards. Carefully accomplished tourism may work as an interaction that recognizes the social and imaginary landscape and could be regarded as an important part of open societies and an opportunity to both promote mutual understanding and cooperation between people from diverse backgrounds.

Lamu after October 2011

I arrived in mid-October 2011, only a few days after the second kidnapping. The place that I left 11/2 year earlier, filled with confidence for a sustainable tourism development had undergone a remarkable change. Everybody I talked to were in shock and despair: ‘-How could

this happen here? The safest place in the world! Will we ever recover? From what should we live?

When I completed my field work on tourism's impact in 2010 the Lamu society was at a crossroad for the future development. Active involvement in enlarged tourism business was planned and asked for, the new Kenya constitution was to be implemented, the Somali pirates were active outside the coast area and despite that the Lamu Port Project²⁹⁴ had been decided in the parliament. Only few I spoke to had proper information about the project and could overlook and understand the consequences of such a huge plan in their close surroundings. Some were very positive and looked forward to expansive economic development including new possibilities for tourism activities, some were skeptical since it was a lack of proper information and they thought that like many other big plans it will never be fulfilled. There were also some negative voices that expressed their fear that their World Heritage Site including the surrounding sensitive landscape should be extinct by LAPSET.

As I stressed in my paper from 2011, the lack of functional and powerful local institutions was a problem. Most decisions about the region's development were taken far from Lamu and like so many times before the local people feared to be misfortune and not listened to. Still it was a new hope for future development connected with the new constitution that would bring more local power out in the districts. Tourism activities were improving and it was hope for new good seasons.

Then came the two kidnappings. After the first attack people were not so worried, it had happened quite far from Lamu town, close to the Somalia border and could be regarded as a

See further information about the project at:
http://www.vision2030.go.ke/index.php/pillars/project/macro_enablers/181

single occasion. But after the second at Manda Island, just opposite Shela village everything was turned upside down. Everybody feared that this the start of a new era with violence and attacks. The fear was shared also by the Kenyan government and embassies from all over the world, Lamu became banned from all visits. Suddenly all the bookings were cancelled and the local people had to face a season without any income from tourism.

I returned again in May 2013. Even this time I was one a very few visitors but this was normal since it was low season. However, the levels of visitors had not recovered during the high season; the name of Lamu is still connected with fear and danger. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Sweden, like many other, kept the ban for a whole year and since Swedish tourists are a vital group of visitors, it had big impact. The memory of the riots after the elections 2007 also scared people to book their vacations to Kenya close to the elections in March 2013. It was now obvious that the occasions during 2011 had led to an economical decline for the whole area, even for activities that was not directly engaged in tourism. Another serious effect is that the image of safety that has been a distinctive feature for Lamu, and an important part of Lamu people's identity, was now wiped out and replaced with an approach of danger and fear.

The *reactions* to the abductions, more than the incidents themselves, have shaped the consequences for the local society. As I mentioned earlier, many people engaged in tourism business had to leave the area and those who choose to stay were forced to eke out on small conditions. The number of drug addicted has risen during this period but if that is directly connected with the new circumstances it is demanding to prove.

But there are also some positive consequences that I could notice on my return; the formation of Lamu Tourist association which brings stakeholders and hotelkeepers together to share experiences and to support and secure the tourism development, the reconstruction of the

farms on Manda Island for safeguarding food supply, a new wave of immigration and new work opportunities at LAPSET, an evolving awareness and interest in issues outside Lamu district and most crucial, the implementation of the new constitution that gives more local power to the districts and a locally elected governor who have restored the hope for a better future.

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