

Religious pilgrimages as a mechanism for the preservation of tangible and intangible heritage: the case of KwaZulu-Natal Province

NOMPUMELELO LINDA

Department of Recreation and Tourism, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zululand

Contacting author: lindano@unizulu.ac.za

Abstract | Over the past decades, the religious practice has experienced constant shifts, which contributed to the pilgrimage phenomenon exhibiting an upward trend. Given the inclusion of package tours and significant visitor volume, many religious monuments have also become increasingly appealing to tourists. The religious (spiritual) power is where people regularly spend their time and money, while a real infrastructure has been designed around them, ranging from roads or infrastructure construction to more complex services like hotels, restaurants, or commercial stalls selling souvenirs or additional goods that are somewhat related to religious practice. The purpose of this paper is to examine the preservation of tangible and intangible heritage in religious pilgrimages (such as pilgrimage destinations, demographic characteristics, and accommodations) in the KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) province in South Africa. This paper further intends to assess the pilgrimage destinations as a mechanism for religious pilgrimages that have tangible and intangible heritage for low-density populations. A quantitative research design was employed, as the nature of this research necessitates the use of numerical data and descriptive statistics to draw conclusions. A standardised questionnaire was used to collect data from 410 respondents selected using a convenience sampling technique from different pilgrimage destinations in KZN, South Africa. Descriptive, bivariate, and multivariate analyses were conducted using IBM's SPSS version 28 software. The findings of this study revealed that the majority of the respondents struggle to get accommodation, and pilgrimage destinations receive a large number of pilgrims. The pilgrimage destinations are visited during the high season by a large number of pilgrims. The findings further reveal that African religious pilgrimages preserve the tangible and intangible heritage of religious pilgrimages. The study recommends that stakeholders preserve religious pilgrimages such that they promote them as heritage/ religious tourism and/or socio-economic development stimuli within the study areas and elsewhere in South Africa. Also to promote tangible and intangible experiences that can be valued by everyone who visits pilgrimage destinations within the province. This paper further recommends the development of accommodation and restaurant establishments for the pilgrims who come from outside the province/ the country and elsewhere.

Keywords | Religious Pilgrimage, Tangible and Intangible, Heritage, Low-Density Areas, Preservation

1. Introduction

Intangible cultural heritage (ICH) can be a substantial tourism resource for both the government and local communities (Qiu, Zuo & Zhang, 2022). ICH is widely regarded as having significance for both cultural diversity and tourism marketing. Despite using the phrase "intangible" in the term, ICH comprises not only immaterial elements such as practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, and abilities, but also tangible aspects such as objects, artifacts, and cultural sites (Dimitropoulos et al, 2018; Volchek, 2022). Sacred sites are continuously under threat from rising visitor numbers and inappropriate construction. Tourism penetrated several religious sites, altering the original scenery and affecting the holiness of the sanctuaries (Duda, 2021). The current study explores residents' observations and experiences with tourist encounters and interventions in sacred places. The histories of both phenomena are inextricably linked, and it is possible to claim that pilgrimage activities can be transformed into religious tourism (Kim, Kim & King, 2020). For example, religious pilgrims who travel for spiritual reasons frequently engage in sightseeing along the way, which is primarily a tourist activity (Terzidou et al., 2018). According to studies, religious issues are not the only ones considered by visitors to religious sites or events, and their motivation to travel is composed of religious, cultural, traditional, spiritual, and landscape dimensions, which often contribute to the intention and decision to set out on a trip (Amaro, Antunes & Henriques, 2018; Kaewumpai, 2017; Kim & Kim, 2018; Terzidou et al., 2018; Wang, Chen & Huang, 2016). This means that, in the last few decades, traditional pilgrimage destinations have also become multifunctional tourist sites that welcome visitors who are moved by their religious beliefs as well as those interested in their historical heritage or the architectural, cultural, or artistic value of the sites (Ramírez & Fernández, 2018; Geary, 2018; Musa et al., 2017). Pilgrimages are a form of illustrating religious devotion by visiting holy sites, which are frequently the gravesites of saints, the sites of religious martyrs' deaths, or the location of sacred relics (Ron & Timothy, 2018; Arjana, 2017). The local community and worshippers have a mixed relationship with tourists who visit there (Tian et al., 2024). Residents frequently value their culture and religion, whereas tourists can disrupt ceremonies related to religion and present maintenance challenges. This study attempts to show that religious pilgrimages have a potential mechanism for the preservation of tangible and intangible heritage. Preserving and maintaining heritage religious sites is crucial for maintaining cultural values (Mekonnen, Bires & Berhanu, 2022; Nicolaides, 2016).

Local governments should be able to promote pilgrimage destinations while implementing an integrated development strategy that enables pilgrims and local communities to comprehend the significance of pilgrimage destinations (Wu, Chang & Wu, 2019; Aulet & Vidal, 2018). According to Melian, Prats, and Coromina (2016), restorative shrines fall somewhere between accessible and religious tourism. They discovered that religious and nonreligious visitors appreciated different characteristics of accessibility. The study area could embrace sustainable facilities that contribute to pilgrimage destinations, pilgrims, stakeholders, and local populations. The development of amenities

for pilgrimage sites may be sustainable, and everyone may desire to visit these locations. According to Jamal and Camago (2014), it is essential to develop strategies for enhancing tourism service quality.

These sacred places are acknowledged as such by apparitions and supernatural events that occur there. The pilgrimage is a journey that is as valuable (if not more so) for the journey itself and the experiences associated with it as it is for the destination (Timothy, 2021; Collins-Kreiner, Kliot, Mansfeld & Sagi, 2017; Norman, 2014). It is likely to be a journey with an explicitly spiritual component, whether this pertains to the ultimate goal of reaching a specific church or shrine, or with an awareness of God's providence guiding the pilgrim's encounters along the way (Sellner, 2020; Scholem, 2011). It is believed that religious pilgrimages play a significant role towards the preservation of tangible and intangible heritage.

2. Literature Review

The study area can have sustainable facilities that can benefit the pilgrimage destinations, pilgrims, stakeholders, and local communities (Shinde & Olsen, 2022; Romanelli et al, 2021). Depending on the positive or negative impact of pilgrimage destinations, sustainable development may be a viable option for ensuring that the sites remain accessible, well-maintained, and beneficial to both residents and tourists/pilgrims. The study is premised on the idea that through tourism development, African religious pilgrimages will be able to contribute to sustainability in the pilgrimage destinations. By doing so, everyone who takes part in religious pilgrimages might be encouraged to act appropriately when visiting the pilgrimage destinations. The current study promotes the idea that well-maintained pilgrimage destinations are beneficial to all. The sustainability of the tourism value chains (TVCs) for religious pilgrimages should be integrated in such a way that one is interdependent on the other, reducing poverty in the studied area. According to surveys undertaken by Olya (2020), the long-term viability of tourist development depends on the support of local communities and citizens. The pilgrimage destinations may be harmed if the study area receives great numbers of visitors on a regular basis (Wang et al., 2016; Smith, 2012). The environment could be gravely harmed if certain activities are carried out in pilgrimage destinations. Pilgrimage tourism, as recommended in this study, necessitates the collaboration of local communities to contribute to sustainable tourism development. These pilgrimage destinations can be preserved for the future since they benefit everyone who lives in the area and help to maintain infrastructure and resources (Mamirkulova, et al., 2020; Jaelani, 2017). Figures 1 and 2 are some of the intangible and tangible resources that need to be preserved in the study area.



Figure 1 | Tangible resource Spring
Source: Ngome.wordpress.com



Figure 2 | Tangible Grotto
Source: Ngome.wordpress.com

The researcher's contribution can be beneficial to the pilgrimage destinations and other stakeholders. The construction of amenities for pilgrimage destinations may be sustainable and everyone would want to visit these locations. TVCs can play a huge role in providing the pilgrimage destinations and the study area with opportunities that can alleviate poverty and bring revenues (Gomes, 2021; Griffin, 2018). Education, unemployment, and infrastructure might all be improved in pilgrimage destinations. If local communities and pilgrimage managers are aware of the benefits that these developments can provide, they stand to benefit from pilgrim growth in the study area (Romanelli *et al.*, 2021).

This paper presents a theoretical framework that informs this study that can assist in understanding the contribution of pilgrimage tourism through various nodes in the value chain and subsequently on the mechanism for the preservation of the tangible and intangible heritage of religious pilgrimages in the study area.



Figure 3 | Tangible Facility Church
Source: Ngome.wordpress.com

The tourism value chains theory (TVCs) is widely used in tourism-related studies (WTTC, 2014; WTO, 2014; Christian, Fernandez-Stark, Ahmed & Gereffi, 2011; Christian, 2012, Romero & Tejada, 2010). The tourism value chains theory focuses on actions and activities that create value throughout the chain from the origin of the religious pilgrim to the pilgrimage destination. Tourism promotion and marketing can lead to overall benefits – environmental, social, cultural, and economic – to the area under study as well as to the pilgrims (Prozano, 2018; Vijayanand, 2012). Promoting and marketing TVCs might help to promote and resolve the rising gap between the requirements to satisfy the growing needs of pilgrims, resulting in rapid tourism development (Prozano, 2018; Sulaiman, 2013). Inadequate numbers of TVCs and socio-economic resources might wreak havoc on pilgrimage places. Sustainability, equitable economic growth, environmental, cultural promotion, and good governance all guide tourism development (Brokaj, 2014; Southgate & Sharpley, 2014).

3. Methodology

This paper discusses the methodological procedures and techniques that were employed in the study. A mixed-method research design was adopted, which suggests that both quantitative and qualitative modes of research inquiry were used during the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data (Leavy, 2022). The design is appropriate to collect the necessary data on “the tangible and intangible attributes of pilgrimage destinations in the low-density areas”; the tangible and intangible heritages that are packaged for tourists, and pilgrims in the study area”; “the perceptions of respondents on the preservation of pilgrimage destinations in low-density areas”; and “a mechanism for preserving the religious pilgrimages within the low population density areas”. The management should adopt the proposed strategy as a recommendation to protect the tangible and intangible heritage in the low-density areas. A quantitative research design was employed, as the nature of this research necessitates the use of numerical data and descriptive statistics to draw conclusions. 450 respondents were chosen using a convenient sampling technique, which is a non-probability selection strategy from various destinations for pilgrimage in KZN, South Africa. This sample size is considered sufficient to meet the research objectives and draw conclusions ((Pandey & Pandey, 2021). Data were collected using a standardised survey form. The instrument's questions were divided into two types: category variables (responds profile) and ordinal variables on a 5-point Likert scale. Descriptive, bivariate, and multivariate analyses were conducted using IBM's SPSS version 29 software. The purpose of this paper is to examine the preservation of tangible and intangible heritage in religious pilgrimages (such as pilgrimage destinations, demographic characteristics, and accommodations) in the KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) province in South Africa. This paper further intends to assess the pilgrimage destinations as a mechanism for religious pilgrimages that have tangible and intangible heritage for low-density populations.

This study's research sample was summarized by employing descriptive statistics (Kim, Lee & Kim, 2017). Mann-Whitney U tests were employed in data analysis to seek correlations between variables (Hodges et al., 2023). The Mann-Whitney U test is a commonly used method to compare two independent samples (Oti et al., 2021). Variables such as respondents' age and gender were recoded into two distinct categories.

4. Findings and Discussion

The section begins with a presentation and analysis of sociodemographic data, followed by a discussion of respondents' characteristics and travel patterns. This was done primarily to assess the demographics of the research area and to determine if these. Importantly, the study employed the analysis to assess which demographic category(ies) contributed the most to completing the survey and accomplishing the study's objectives (see Table 1). Respondents' socio-demographic variables include gender, age, marital status, education levels, employment status, specific occupation, income levels, and institutions of employment. The aforementioned characteristics are described in Table 1 below.

Table 1 | Respondents' profile (N=410)

| Variable | Category | Frequency (%) |
|--------------------|------------------------------|---------------|
| Gender | Male | 46 |
| | Female | 54 |
| Age | 18-35 | 59 |
| | 36 and above | 41 |
| Marital status | Single | 41 |
| | Married | 30 |
| | Divorced | 14 |
| | Separated | 9 |
| | Widowed | 5 |
| Level of education | No Western Education | 15 |
| | Primary | 8 |
| | Secondary | 15 |
| | Tertiary education (Diploma) | 17 |
| | Tertiary education (Degree) | 46 |

Source: Own elaboration

According to the statistics in Table 1, 46% of the participants were males, while 54% were females. The reason for this distribution could be that the majority of pilgrims were female. These findings were based on the fact that there are generally more females compared to males at religious pilgrimages in the study area. Female religious pilgrims constitute a higher percentage, according to

Nugraha and Widyaningsih (2021), and Shuo, Ryan and Liu (2009). In terms of age, approximately 59 percent were between the ages of 18 and 35, while 41% were aged 36 to 56 or beyond. According to the information, youths constituted the majority of survey participants. According to Tiessen (2012) and Liro (2021), youths visit religious pilgrimages in greater numbers than other age groups. This could be ascribed to the reality that a majority of the country's population is young, and they take part actively in any local development that occurs within the study area.

The respondents were asked regarding their marital status. This was done primarily to determine the number of married respondents that participated in the survey, as marriage frequently correlates with maturity. As shown in Table 1, approximately 41% of respondents in the study area were single, whereas 30% were married. Those who were divorced accounted for 14%, separated for 9%, and widowed for 5%. Given the above controversy, it would be interesting to investigate whether respondents' marital status influenced overall responses to religious tourism-related questionnaires. According to Dillman and Christian (2005), married status influences substantive responses in research since mature respondents are more likely to provide credible data in line.

The respondents' education levels were regarded as an essential variable in this study since it is generally accepted that education enhances awareness and understanding between people and their surroundings (Aminrad, Zakariya, Hadi & Sakari, 2013). The statistics show that 17% of the respondents possess tertiary education/diplomas. 46% of all respondents had a tertiary education (degree). According to the findings, the majority of the respondents had post-matriculated education. 15% of respondents had only a secondary education or had no Western education altogether. Only about 8% of the respondents in the last group had completed primary school. Perhaps, this is due to the fact that most respondents were youths who have matric but never had a chance to further their studies at institutions of higher learning.

The respondent was asked to express his or her opinion on the awareness of the tourism opportunities of religious tourism. About 50% of the total respondents indicated by saying "yes"; 38% said "No" and the minority 12% responded by saying "Not Sure". The reason for respondents' responses can be that they do not have an understanding of religious tourism as a form of tourism. According to Fernandes et al. (2012), some studies revealed that the number of tourists travelling purely for religious reasons is relatively small.

The study additionally sought to establish which pilgrimage destination had the greatest number of visitors and/or pilgrims. Table 2 shows that approximately 26 percent visited eBuhleni, 20% to iNhlankakazi Mountain, 17% visited Ngome, 14% to Mount Khenana, 13% to ekuPhakameni, and 10% to Fatima. These findings demonstrate that pilgrimage destinations have significant potential for tourism, local development, and socioeconomic growth in the study area. These findings demonstrated that if a region attracts a significant number of visitors, it has a substantial opportunity for growth and local development (Fafouti, et al, 2023; Leask, 2022). The importance of pilgrimage centres frequently determines a city's global popularity and prestige (Lourdes, Fatima, San Giovanni

Rotondo, and Czestochowa), influencing the city's promotion and image, and pilgrimage centres themselves represent a unique opportunity for urban space development (Soljan & Liro, 2021).

This section evaluates data to address the objective of this study, which was based on tangible facilities and items packaged for tourists. Faith (intangible) motivates tourists to participate in the resident trade by buying souvenirs or leaving votive offerings, which helps to reactivate specific local craft activities (Golan & Martini, 2022). The pilgrims understood the tangible and intangible heritage accessible within the study area. Worshippers employ rituals and acts to connect with sacred elements. This relationship is fostered by specialists who have been approved to do so. Michelangelo Paganopoulos explains the dynamic nature of these links through ethnographic study at two monasteries in Mount Athos, Greece. The author compares two rival monasteries and demonstrates how monks are adapting traditional hospitality standards to meet tourist needs. Traditional ceremonies stress authenticity and encourage guests to adopt the role of "pilgrims". Rituals empower hosts and visitors to produce real pilgrimage experiences (Soljan & Liro, 2021).

Respondents were asked to reveal the tangible, and intangible heritages that are packaged for tourists and pilgrims in the study area. In a nutshell, the analysed data were collected from the pilgrims, whom were believed to be able to identify tangible facilities and products in the study area. As shown in Table 2, the majority (about 59%) indicated that there were no visible tangible tourism facilities (Tourism value chains [TVCs]) while about 41% said there were tourism products offered within the study area. Those who held an affirmative view regarding the availability of tangible tourism facilities accounted for 22% followed by 51% of the total respondents who agreed that there were tangible and intangible heritage that were visible within the study area. Interestingly, the study found that the response rate with regards to those who were not sure whether tangible tourism facilities were 19% and products existed in the study area was 8%.

Table 2 | Demographic Characteristics (N=410)

| Statements | Categories | Mean | Std. Dev | Frequency (%) |
|--|----------------------|--------|----------|---------------|
| Please indicate the name of the pilgrimage destination visited | EkuPhakameni | 3.3195 | 1.66008 | 13 |
| | EBuhleni | | | 26 |
| | Nhlangakazi Mountain | | | 20 |
| | Mount Khenana | | | 14.4 |
| | Fatima | | | 10 |
| | Ngome | | | 18 |
| Where did you stay during pilgrimage? | In churches | 4.0293 | 2.62658 | 30 |
| | Private car | | | 7 |
| | Taxi | | | 3 |
| | Buses | | | 13 |
| | School hostel | | | 2 |

| | | | | |
|---|----------------------|--------|---------|----|
| | B&B | | | 24 |
| | Lodge | | | 9 |
| | Hotel | | | 2 |
| | Other (Specify....) | | | 10 |
| On what did you <i>mostly</i> spend your money during the pilgrimage? | Transport | 2.2293 | 1.69167 | 43 |
| | Accommodation | | | 33 |
| | Food | | | 15 |
| | Souvenirs | | | 5 |
| | Other (specify....) | | | 4 |
| Which facilities, if any exist, are available at the pilgrimage destinations? | Shops for clothes | 3.0878 | 1.14354 | 14 |
| | Accommodation (type) | | | 6 |
| | Food vendors | | | 49 |
| | Shops for souvenirs | | | 18 |
| | Other (Specify...) | | | 12 |

Source: Own elaboration

Based on the evidence reported in Table 2, it can be concluded that there are no apparent tangible facilities (TVCs) in the subject matter area. Having said that, visitors and/or pilgrims were asked to drive approximately one hundred kilometres to their preferred lodging establishment, exposing them to miss some of the pilgrimage events, as stated in Table 2, which outlines the facilities available at the pilgrimage site. This study, however, contradicts what Liro (2021) and Mróz (2021), state that despite being attracted to faith-oriented circumstances, tourists also engage in other activities, such as exploring and/or purchasing on-site items, such as souvenirs, merchandise, etc.

As a follow-up to the preceding question, it is critical to determine the respondents' in-depth perspectives on the need for tangible facilities and/or items marketed for tourists and/or pilgrims in the study area. One of the Ecclesiastes stated:

"Yes, there is a need for tourism facilities and products designed for visitors and pilgrims, who typically demand a pleasant place to rest and/or refreshments. As a result of the lack of nearby lodgings, tourists/pilgrims are forced to drive plus/minus 100 kilometres from the pilgrimage destinations, exposing them to miss part of the events because some take place at night. Culinary facilities are essential for providing services to visitors and pilgrims. During the pilgrimage, only the food stalls/vendors are open, and some visitors or pilgrims prefer to eat at a decent restaurant."

The aforementioned remark corresponds with that provided by one of the interviewed priests, who stated that:

"Tourism facilities, particularly those that can accommodate specific needs, such as those for disabled pilgrims, are in considerable demand at places of worship. This would ensure that everyone who visits the places is comfortable throughout their stay".

"The pilgrims concurred that there is a need for tourism facilities and products in the study area as they are there for a certain purpose so if they are accommodated not within the area that on its own makes them to miss certain services.

According to Liro et al. (2018) and Soljan and Liro (2020), pilgrims expect modern amenities and accommodations this on its own supports what has been said by the Ecclesiastics, Priests, and the pilgrims that there is a need for tourism facilities and products in the pilgrimage destinations. Despite the similarity between the above respondent's perception and the study's findings regarding visibility and/or availability of tourism facilities and/or products within the study area, one of the priests was uncertain:

"I'm not sure if those amenities and/or products are necessary, so most pilgrims see pilgrimage places in terms of spiritual worth rather than socioeconomic benefits."

Regardless of the nature of the data presented in Table 3, the ensuing in-depth responses might support the conclusion that there is a demand for tourism facilities and/or products in the study area.

Table 3 | Awareness of religious Tourism opportunities _ Perceptions and meaning (N=410)

| Statements | Category | Mean | Std. Dev. | Frequency (%) |
|--|----------|--------|-----------|---------------|
| Do you think the local communities in the study area see the opportunities that are brought by the pilgrim destinations? | Yes | 1.9488 | 1.64289 | 50 |
| | No | | | 38 |
| | Not sure | | | 12 |
| Do you understand the concept 'pilgrimage'? | Yes | 1.7049 | .89455 | 55 |
| | No | | | 20 |
| | Not sure | | | 25 |
| Are the local people of the pilgrimage destination aware of the tourism opportunities? | Yes | 1.7878 | .78889 | 40 |
| | No | | | 42 |
| | Not sure | | | 18 |
| Are there any tangible facilities and products that are packaged for tourists and pilgrims in the study area? | Yes | 1.9707 | .65533 | 22 |
| | No | | | 59 |
| | Not sure | | | 19 |
| Would you regard the tangible facilities and products as contributing factors to the economic development of the study area? | Yes | 1.5640 | .63503 | 51 |
| | No | | | 41 |
| | Not sure | | | 8 |

Source: Own Elaboration.

The objective of the study is to determine respondents' awareness of the tourism prospects presented by the pilgrimage places in the study area. The associated research question concerns whether locals at the pilgrimage site are aware of the tourism opportunities available through the pilgrimages in the study area. In the following sub-sections, the study presents data analysis and interpretation to accomplish the study's objective. The information presented in Tables 2 and 3 indicates that there are no visible accommodation facilities in the study area.

Table 3, indicates that the majority (55%) of the respondents understand the concept 'pilgrimage'. Those who revealed that they were not sure of their understanding of the concept under discussion accounted for 25% of the total respondents. Those who do not understand pilgrimage constituted about 20 % of the total respondents. As a follow-up to the above question, the respondents were asked to state how they understand pilgrimage to be. One of the pilgrims said:

"I do not exactly understand and/or cannot explain in detail what pilgrimage refers to, except that it is where we visit the holy site to worship God every year."

This revealed the pilgrims understand the concept in question. The reason for this understanding could be that pilgrimage leaders always explain the purpose of the pilgrimage to their followers. This assertion was confirmed by the response from one of the interviewed priests who said:

"Most pilgrims have been informed on the main purposes for pilgrimage".

Informed by the above findings, the study has concluded that the concept 'pilgrimage' is understood by the respondents.

a) Awareness of tourism opportunities

The study sought to ascertain the awareness of the respondents regarding (1) Socioeconomic benefits that could be derived from tourists' visits e.g. multiplier effect, and (2) Socioeconomic benefits that can be derived from religious-related activities e.g. its multiplier effect. Table 3 indicates that local people were not aware of the tourism opportunities that were available at the pilgrimage destinations. The majority (42%) revealed that they were not aware of the socioeconomic opportunities that could be derived from visits to pilgrimage destinations, 40% said they were aware and 18% indicated that they were not sure whether there are socioeconomic opportunities that might be derived from visits to pilgrimage destinations or not. Based on the findings, the study concludes that the respondents were not aware of tourism opportunities that can be derived from pilgrimage destinations. One priest gave the following reason for this lack of awareness:

Pilgrims are not aware of the said opportunities on the basis that if they were aware they would establish business enterprises that provide goods and/or services not provided within the pilgrimage destinations e.g. accommodation, culinary, artefacts, etc. Similarly, one of the pilgrims who is also a community member affirmed that:

"Pilgrims perceive pilgrimage destinations as sacred spaces designed solely for worshipping purposes".

Based on the above responses, it can be safely concluded that the lack of awareness is due to the pilgrims' perception that pilgrimage destinations are to be used for spiritual restoration purposes only. This does not align with the assertion made by Rifai (2015) that apart from spiritual services, religious tourism also provides socio-economic development opportunities. Nicolaidis (2016; 2015) concurs that socioeconomic opportunities might be achieved if the pilgrimage destinations are well-developed and/or sustained in a responsible manner.

However, the majority of the study's respondents contend that these destinations have the potential for tangible infrastructure, and that tourists and pilgrims seek hospitality services while visiting these locations. This indicates a clear void in religious tourism theories, which this study intends to solve by proposing a strategy for increasing TVC development through tourism development of religious pilgrimage destinations. This is consistent with one of the study objectives, which is to fill the observed scholarly gap by developing a new framework for pilgrimage tourism development in the study area.

5. Research Limitations

Since the study results are particular to the study areas (Zululand district, King Cetshwayo district, iLembe district, and eThekweni Metropolitan) at the time the study was conducted, the findings were obtained from the survey that was conducted across regions and nations. Respondents are sometimes lazy to fill in the questionnaires and scared to provide certain information because they fear that they might be misquoted, or information used for certain purposes which could lead them into trouble. Lack of information and ignorance was another limitation that the researcher encountered or experienced with the respondents. The study recommended a strategy that could help the management, local communities, and the pilgrims to know about these tangible and intangible heritage in the religious pilgrimages.

6. Conclusion

Based on the study objectives, the researcher discovered that the notion of pilgrimage is not well-known in the study area. It was also shown that respondents were unaware of the tourism prospects that could be generated from pilgrimages. The intention was to find out from the respondents/stakeholders whether they perceive these African religious pilgrimages as a mechanism for preserving tangible and intangible heritage in low-density areas (Ferreira, Liberato, Lima & Fernandes, 2023). The obtained data would be shared with the participating municipalities in KwaZulu-Natal so that the study area can be viewed as a tourism destination. The provincial

government should play a significant role in creating tourism opportunities, and there are no tourism facilities available within the study area as visitors and/or pilgrims had to drive approximately 100 kilometres to get the accommodation of their choice. The pilgrims from the Nazareth Baptist Church set up tents so that they could attend all of the pilgrimage events, and they were accustomed to this type of accommodation. However, in-depth responses revealed a need for tourism infrastructure and/or products in the study area. According to the study, pilgrimage destinations can improve the study area's tangible facility status. The study also discovered that socioeconomic benefits made by religious pilgrimages can influence opinions of pilgrimage destinations. According to the conclusions, the study's strategic planning document includes the potential for growth in tourism at pilgrimage destinations. As a result, it is possible to conclude that pilgrimage destinations are seen to have tourism prospects in the communities in inquiry.

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