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Business Tourism in an African city: Evidence from Harare, Zimbabwe

Abstract. There are many studies on business tourism conducted by authors from the Global North. Research on business tourism in the Global South remains underdeveloped despite its significance for many leading urban tourism destinations. Arguably, the need for more research on business tourism is particularly evident in major cities of sub-Saharan Africa, where this sector is frequently more significant than leisure tourism. This article contributes to addressing the knowledge gap on business tourism in urban Africa, by focusing on tourism connected with meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions (MICE) in Harare, Zimbabwe's capital city. The study is based on data collected during qualitative interviews with respondents from all hotels in Harare that have facilities to accommodate business events. The focus was on the competitiveness of the city's business tourism economy, the nature of business events in the city, and local impacts for the impoverished population.

Keywords: business tourism, MICE tourism, urban tourism, competitiveness, pro-poor impacts poor

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1. Introduction

As disclosed by the review of recent literature authored by Page & Duignan (2023), scholarship on urban tourism is massively dominated by research which is undertaken in cities of the Global North. Urban tourism is, however, a critical component in many destinations of the Global South (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2021a). One vital dimension of the 'other half of urban tourism', namely tourism in cities of the Global South, is business tourism (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2021b). As observed by Marques & Santos (2016, p. 4), international debates around business tour-

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ism “are characterised by a heterogeneity of concepts and a lack of standardised terminology”. Although scholars do not agree on what business tourism is (Lau, 2004), the most widely used definition is that mainstream business tourism applies to mobilities for independent business trips and travelling to participate in meetings, conferences and exhibitions (MICE tourism) (Davidson, 1994; Rogers, 2013).

This article investigates the state of MICE tourism in one African city drawing on results of a study conducted during the period of recovery from the most extreme impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the international context, research on business tourism in African cities is of particular interest because sub-Saharan Africa represents a distinctive region in the global tourism economy, where business tourism accounts for a higher proportion of total tourism receipts than in the case of other global regions (Rogerson, 2014, 2015a; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2021c). A ranking of countries according to the share of business travel in their overall tourism portfolio revealed that 18 of the top 20 countries in the world are from sub-Saharan Africa (Daly, 2017). Business travel tends to concentrate in cities, especially large economic centres and/or capital cities which are the locus of economic and political power (Rogerson, 2015a, 2015b; Tichaawa, 2017; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2021c, 2021d). African cities such as Accra, Addis Ababa, Douala, Johannesburg, Nairobi, Maputo and Pretoria are examples of destinations which host domestic and international business events as well as meetings with government officials, NGOs and international development agencies. There is a growing body of literature on business tourism in sub-Saharan Africa, most of which concerns South Africa. The historical evolution and the contemporary significance of business tourism in South African cities has been highlighted in several studies (Rogerson, 2005; Donaldson, 2013; Rogerson, 2014; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2014; Rogerson, 2015b; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2017; Rogerson, 2019).

The aim of this article is to expand the body of research on African business tourism by examining the characteristics, competitiveness and impacts of MICE tourism in Harare, the capital city of Zimbabwe. While the study represents the formal part of the business tourism landscape in an African city, one should be aware that there is also an economy of informal business tourism, mainly driven by cross-border traders, which constitutes another critical (and often unrecognized) segment of the tourism business economy in urban Africa (Rogerson, 2015a). Our findings on the formal economy of MICE tourism are based on a set of qualitative interviews which were conducted with stakeholder representatives from all the hotels in Harare that have facilities to host MICE events. The following section contains a review of the literature on business tourism and a discussion of Harare as an African business tourism destination.

2. Literature Review

In the pre-COVID-19 period, business tourism represented one of the fastest expanding segments of the global tourism economy. Since the 1980s, with accelerating trends of globalization, MICE-related travel has been recognised as a critical dimension of international tourism (Oppermann, 1996; Davidson & Rogers, 2006; Ladkin, 2006; Willis et al., 2017). Among others, Ladkin (2006, p. 56) pointed out that during the 2000s the MICE sector was “extensive and rapidly growing” and Marques (2020, p. 7) and that “business tourism is a fast growing lucrative segment” of tourism. The COVID-19 pandemic, however, severely impacted the global activity in the field of business tourism as in-person business events were replaced with video-conferencing or hybrid events (Litvinova-Kulikova, Aliyeva & David, 2023; Müller & Wittner, 2023).

According to Williams (2009), the burgeoning growth of business tourism is inseparable from several key characteristics that are considered beneficial for urban destinations: it is a high quality/high yield sector, it is associated with a year-around activity, it complements leisure tourism by using much of its infrastructure and can be a significant driver for urban regeneration. It is argued that this form of tourism provides significant economic benefits for destinations because daily expenditures of business visitors tend to be higher than those of leisure tourists (Seebaluck, Naidoo & Ramseook-Munhurrán, 2015). Law (1987) and Lau (2004) stress that national and local governments have been increasingly becoming aware of the potential of MICE tourism because it is associated with relatively high daily expenditures and can be a lucrative source of revenue. MICE tourism can bring other benefits to destinations, such as image enhancement. The policy relevance of developing business tourism is underscored by several investigations undertaken in Portugal (Marques & Santos, 2016, 2017a, 2017b; Marques, 2020). Regarding the city of Porto, Marques & Pinho (2021) emphasise that business tourism is a strategic tourism product, which complements leisure tourism and facilitates entrepreneurship and serves as a catalyst of local and regional development. Lau (2004, p. 12) highlights that MICE activities “can result in associated social and cultural benefits to a destination, enhance the exchange of ideas, foster business connections, provide forums for continuing education and training, and facilitate technology transfer”. MICE tourism often incorporates an element of leisure tourism as conference attendees extend their stay in destinations for leisure purposes, which blurs the distinction between business and leisure tourism (Ladkin, 2006; Davidson, 2019). Willis et al. (2017, p. 49) mention certain other advantages “such as the spread of knowledge and professional practices and the building of better understanding and relationships between different regions and cultures”.

Business tourism as a whole and MICE tourism in particular develops around urban centres (Marques & Santos, 2016; Pinho & Marques, 2021; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2021a, 2021b). Indeed, for Law (1993, p. 39), MICE tourism emerged as one of “the staples of city tourism”. For Marques (2020, p. 8), “business tourism represents an important weight in the local and regional economy and corresponds to a tourist segment with great potential of development”. Davidson (2019, 2020) reiterates the point that most studies on urban tourism identify business tourism as a core segment of tourism in cities and stresses that a significant share of urban tourism is associated with business tourists who attend MICE events. Critical factors influencing where MICE events occur are the existence of high standards of conference and accommodation facilities, which are usually found in capital cities (Law, 1987, 1993). Wan (2011) discusses the role of premium hotels which are often chosen as venues for conferences or other business events. Rogers and Davidson (2016) observe that in response to a surge in demand for business tourism, many cities in the Global North, recognising the benefits from hosting conferences, have encouraged the establishment of purpose-built conference centres. Dedicated MICE properties such as convention centres and exhibition halls can serve as vital assets in city development strategies and are supported by significant amounts of public funds. There is evidence that such facilities attract investors into cities and generate “substantial returns to local economies in the form of spending on local accommodation, local transportation and other tourism products” (Lau, 2004, p. 1). Marques and Santos (2016) point out that given the potential of business tourism, European urban destinations try to provide excellent service to visitors in order to ensure high levels of satisfaction during their stay in the city.

Notwithstanding the economic importance of MICE tourism and its high profile in urban economic development programming, it has occupied only a minor role in the broad agenda of tourism scholarship (Weber & Chon, 2002; Lau, 2004). According to Pinho and Marques (2021), until 2000 the literature on business tourism was sparse. Celuch and Davidson (2009) noted that despite business tourism accounting for (at least) a quarter of visitors to some destinations, the sector was under-represented in comparison to studies on leisure tourism. Similarly, Willis et al. (2017, p. 49) argue that in spite of its importance, “research on business travel is relatively limited within the tourism literature”. While recognising this disproportion, Davidson (2019, p. 117) claims that interest in business tourism has been growing in recent years. According to Pinho and Marques (2021), the latest literature includes several country studies on determinants of business tourism, market development. Among key themes are the economic impacts of business tourism, location factors considered by meeting planners, changes taking place in the MICE sector, the role of destination image, the marketing of destinations for

business events and, increasingly, sustainability issues and environmental impacts of events (Borodako et al., 2011; Borodako et al., 2019; Celuch, 2019; Bik, Poreda & Matczak, 2020; Arcodia, 2023; Celuch, 2023). After the COVID-19 pandemic, research topics also include the role of technology in transforming business events, the growing popularity of hybrid business events as part of the new normal (Lekgau & Tichaawa, 2022a; Litvinova-Kulikova, Aliyeva & David, 2023; Müller & Wittner, 2023). Strategies for the recovery and revitalization of business tourism in Europe have also been studied (Carvalho, 2023).

In the Global South, the essential drivers of the expansion of MICE tourism exhibit close parallels with those in the Global North (Rogerson, 2015a; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2021b). This sector revolves around an infrastructure of (mainly up-market) business hotels, convention centres and competition between countries and cities to host business events. Across Africa, the growth of business events and business travel, mostly involving regional (African) or domestic travellers as well as a (lesser) flow of international business tourists, has been facilitated by the construction of convention centres in large cities or national capitals. One manifestation of this trend is the recent boom in upmarket hotel accommodation operated by (or branded by) leading North-based hotel chains (such as Marriott or Hilton) and by South African-based hotel chains, which have expanded their operations to other countries of southern Africa (Rogerson, 2016). Beyond the business hotel, South Africa and Cameroon have seen the emergence of a range of other types of accommodation establishments directed at business traveller, such as the all-suite hotel (Rogerson, 2011) and serviced apartment (Greenberg & Rogerson, 2015; Tichaawa, 2017; Greenberg & Rogerson, 2018, 2019). A recent study by Rogerson & Rogerson (2022) indicates that the COVID-19 pandemic caused a downturn in business tourism in major cities across Africa, which the sector tried to overcome by switching to virtual and hybrid events (Lekgau & Tichaawa, 2022a, 2022b, 2022c).

The next section turns to Harare as a MICE destination and the results of research on the state of the economy of MICE tourism in Zimbabwe's leading urban centre. It is acknowledged that this is one dimension of business tourism in the African city, for alongside it, there is the economy of informal business tourism, mainly driven by cross-border traders, and constitutes another critical (and often unrecognised) segment of the tourism business economy in urban Africa.

3. Harare — an African Business City

The city of Harare, which used to be called Salisbury from 1890 to 1982, is the capital and largest city of Zimbabwe. It is the most populous urban area in Zimbabwe, the centre of the national government as well as the country's major commercial location and the main international gateway (Toriro, 2018). Given its central political and economic role, it is home to many government agencies and foreign embassies, and to the headquarters of the country's largest business enterprises. The role of Harare as a business tourism destination cannot be fully understood without the broader context of tourism development and of its drivers in Zimbabwe. The tourism sector in Zimbabwe has experienced major shifts since its independence in 1980. Chingarande (2014) notes that Zimbabwe recorded its largest growth in tourism arrivals and receipts during the first two decades (1980–2000) of the post-colonial era. The highest growth (35%) occurred in 1995, when the country hosted the All Africa Games (Zimbabwe Tourism Authority, 2014). With a rise in both leisure and business travel, the country was referred to as the 'wanderlust destination' (Zengeni & Zengeni, 2012). From 2000, however, there was a drastic downturn in tourism flows, as a result of political upheavals following the chaotic land grabs of Mugabe and the accompanying negative media publicity (Woyo & Slabbert, 2023). Travel bans and warnings regarding Zimbabwe were issued by the USA, the UK, Canada, and Australia. In the following decade, little attention was paid to the country's leisure tourism offerings because of a severe economic downturn (Miriimi et al., 2013). Since 2010 the tourism economy of Zimbabwe has shown small signs of a revival (Shereni, Saarinen & Rogerson, 2022; Woyo & Slabbert, 2023).

One area where that revival has been evident is business tourism. As in the case of many sub-Saharan countries, business tourism is a key driver of tourism in Zimbabwe. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the country was viewed as one of the top business tourism destinations in Africa, especially as regards MICE tourism (Makoni & Tichaawa, 2021). Following the successful hosting of the Africa Tourism Association Congress in 2012 at Victoria Falls and the co-hosting with Zambia of the UNWTO General Assembly in 2013, the country's business tourism sector was significantly strengthened (Zhou, 2013).



Figure 1. Location of Harare in Zimbabwe
Source: Authors

Table 1. Hotel and conference establishments in Harare

Hotels	29
Hotels with conference facilities	10
International convention centres	1
Hotels with facilities to host international conferences	4
3-star to 5-star hotels	3
Accommodation establishments	152

Source: Zimbabwe Tourism Authority, an unpublished database

Harare is a major cluster of accommodation services for business travellers, most importantly, a network of business hotels with conference facilities. As can be seen in Table 1, the city has over 80 accommodation establishments, including 29 hotels. The International Convention Centre (ICC) in Harare is the only such facility in Zimbabwe (Figure 2). Of the 29 hotels, 10 have conference facilities, but only three offer conference facilities of an international standard (Table 1). The leading city hotels include Simba Harare Guest Lodge, Cresta Lodge, Holiday Inn

Harare, the (historic) Meikles Hotel, New Ambassador, The N1, Cresta Jameson, The Monomotapa Hotel, and the Rainbow Towers and Conference Centre Hotel, all of which host business events of both domestic and international significance. The city's accommodation sector has a small number of foreign-owned hospitality enterprises such as Rainbow Tourism Group, Cresta Hospitality Group, and African Sun Limited; the majority of the hotel stock in Harare is domestically owned.



Figure 2. The leading business tourism facility in Harare — Rainbow Towers (left) and the International Conference Centre (right).
Source: Rainbow Tourism Group (2023)

4. The Case Study and the Research Method

The study focused on 10 Harare hotels with conference facilities. Table 2 provides details of 10 respondents who were interviewed during the period April–November 2022.

Table 2. Information about respondents and types of establishments they represented

Type of establishment	Nationality	Sex/Age	Position	No. of years in the position	Code
Hotel and ICC	Zimbabwean	Male 45	Deputy General Manager	4	KI 1
Hotel and conference facility	Zimbabwean	Female 50	Events and conference manager	12	KI 2
Hotel and conference facility	Zimbabwean	Male 51	Conference manager	20	KI 3
Hotel and conference facility	Zimbabwean	Male 43	Guest Relations Manager	7	KI 4

Type of establishment	Nationality	Sex/Age	Position	No. of years in the position	Code
Hotel and resort	Zimbabwean	Male 42	Conferencing and Events Manager	3	KI 5
Hotel	Zimbabwean	Female 40	Hotel and conferencing manager	5	KI 6
Hotel	Zimbabwean	Female 38	Conference Manager	4	KI 7
Hotel and lodge	Zimbabwean	Female 56	General manager	15	KI 8
Hotel	Zimbabwean	Male 55	General manager	17	KI 9
Hotel	Zimbabwean	Male 41	Sales and marketing manager	11	KI 10

Source: Authors

The qualitative interviews were designed to capture opinions of key stakeholders representing all hotels in Harare which have conference facilities to host MICE events. Only four establishments offer facilities that are of international standard and therefore have an infrastructure to accommodate international as well as domestic MICE events. The other six hotels have conference venues that are only sufficient to host domestic business events. While all the hotels can and do occasionally accommodate guests other than participants of business events, the interviews focused on their role as venues for business tourism or MICE tourism. Questions concerned the following topics (1) the competitiveness of the local MICE sector; (2) the types of business events (both international and domestic) which occur in Harare, and (3) local impacts of the business tourism economy.

5. Results

5.1. The Competitiveness of Harare's Business Tourism Sector

Given the small number of hotels with conference facilities in Harare, the infrastructure that can support business tourism in Harare is relatively small compared to that of competing regional destinations such as Johannesburg, Cape Town or Nairobi (Rogerson, 2015a, 2015b; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2021c). In addition, in Zimbabwe, Harare, as a venue for business events and conferences, often is

in competition with Victoria Falls, the iconic leisure tourist resort. This broad picture of the competitiveness of Harare as a business tourism destination is extended now by an analysis of the viewpoints of the ten key stakeholders who were interviewed.

From the interviews, the stakeholders offered a positive perspective on the competitiveness of Harare as a business destination but, at the same time, flagged a number of critical challenges that impacted the city's business tourism economy. Although the limited base of international standard convention facilities was acknowledged informants expressed positive sentiments about the state of the local MICE sector, often by comparison of the health of Zimbabwe's business tourism economy relative to other African contexts.

I think Harare is one of the best conference destinations in Africa (KI 1).

If you trace back to check the conferences we have hosted in the past five years, we are not doing badly; I think in Southern Africa, we are just behind South Africa in that. The only thing is that there is only one International Convention Centre in Zimbabwe, and they have a lot of them in South Africa. Put aside the fact that there are not many; we don't need many of them to be competitive (KI 2).

There is a general perception that Zimbabwe is struggling and the economy is down. Yes, this is true, but that needs to be weighed when looking at our industry. The hotel industry here in Harare and in Victoria Falls is not struggling. We just have a few glitches, but it is not worse than neighbouring countries (KI 3).

Key challenges mentioned by the respondents concerned insufficient basic infrastructure:

The problem we currently face is development problems like infrastructure, electricity and water. I honestly think these are just administrative issues, just like any other typical African city (KI 1).

Other informants suggested that the business economy of Harare was in reasonable health, albeit re-iterated fundamental issues of infrastructural shortcomings in terms of electricity and water. A strong theme in the responses was that it was the conditions in the national environment that were negatively impacting the functionality of Harare as a business tourism destination. Several responses were given by the informants expressing such concerns.

The business and meetings industry of Zimbabwe in general is doing quite well. Yes, we do have constraints economically and also we have a lot of developmental and infrastructural problems. Our facilities are of good quality but the surroundings are very bad. The worse situation is when we have no electricity or water during the conference, and the backups are not really reliable (KI 3).

Our country is obviously poor, but which African country isn't? South Africa? They are also poor there. Now they even have power cuts like us and generally the citizens are poor as well, just like Zimbabweans. I would say that our country's situation especially the politics slows down business generally, but we are not the worst in Africa. Our conference industry, especially here in Harare and also Victoria Falls are competing with the like of South Africa to host big international events, and we have been hosting a lot of these events. My only worry is the politics here and media too. Above all, our infrastructure may need to be redeveloped to attract more business conferences (KI 1).

One respondent provided a historical perspective on the situation of the city's business tourism linking its fluctuating fortunes to the unstable political conditions in the country.

Harare has a good history of hosting international conventions. This city was once an events centre, especially in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Then politics happened and everything went down to the drain. It is only from around 2010 that our industry started to grow again (KI 1).

The emergence of the Government of National Union (GNU) in 2009 was a brief turning point in the history of MICE tourism in Harare. It boosted the confidence of international organizations and encouraged them to host business conferences in Zimbabwe. Thanks to its improved image, Zimbabwe was awarded the title of World's Best Tourist Destination in 2014, mainly as a result of its success in hosting the UNWTO General Assembly in 2013. In 2013, the UNWTO endorsed Zimbabwe as one of the best conference destinations in Africa. However, following the collapse of the GNU in 2013, the resulting changes in the political landscape considerably limited the city's ability to host domestic and international business events.

As the condition of the national economy started to deteriorate from 2000, the economic landscape in Harare became more informal (Rogerson, 2016). Informality and poverty are defining characteristics of the Zimbabwean economy (Moyo & Gumbo 2021). The main reason being the political and economic crises of the decade after 2000 that resulted in the collapse of the formal economy and its almost complete replacement by the informal economy across virtually all sec-

tors. Harare has been a city in economic distress, increasingly informalizing with estimates that 90 percent of the city's residents have been enduring poverty for at least the past two decades (Moyo & Gumbo, 2021). The advance of informalization negatively impacted the competitiveness of the city's business tourism economy as was pointed out by one informant:

We are affected by the poverty and we host less business conferences than we expect. If you visit our facilities, you will be amazed with what you see inside, but you cannot enjoy taking a walk around outside during the busy days in Harare. Informality is becoming more and more. For those who bring business to us, they see it as unattractive for business, but that is our reality what can we do (KI 5).

The respondents also pointed out that unfavourable international media reports on Harare had a negative effect on the city's image as a MICE destination.

Things are not as good as before, our infrastructure is generally dilapidating, prices are rising and we have a currency issue to resolve. In terms of politics, I will not comment but all I can say is that it is also a major challenge. Our major enemy in Zimbabwe is the international media because what they say about our country is not as worse as they portray (KI 1).

5.2. Business Events Hosted in Harare

It was disclosed in the interviews that the actual nature of business events that occur in Harare has been influenced by the political situation in Zimbabwe and further that changes occurred in business events as a consequence of the country's political landscape.

In the early 1990s we were more flexible with hosting any conferences, but now it's a bit challenging because of the politics here. It is worse when we host the national conference. We have to check who wants to utilize our venues and what exactly the purpose of their meetings is. Anything political here is not to play with around here, it is easy to lose your job here, or even the whole conference shut down (KI 4)

Arguably, according to informants, the period between 2009 and 2013 was critical for changes in the MICE events industry in Zimbabwe. It was stated as follows:

Harare used to host all types of conferences and the administration of it was very easy. But the political violence of 2008 somehow changed everything. Since then we have to

be very particular with the conferences we host. I think it's better with big hotels because they have a different kind of influence than us. During the period between 2009 and 2013 Zimbabwe was under the national union government and a lot of conferences were hosted because of that, but when that union ended, we are just striving through. We still have conferences here and there, but not as much (KI 8).

As regards the hosting of international business events, competition that exists with other Zimbabwean cities is mediated by the government:

So how it works is that the ministry does the bidding to host especially the major international organizations. Once Zimbabwe wins the bidding, the ministry will then assign a city based on capacity and the tourism around the area. That is why we are always in competition with Victoria Falls because of the falls and the national parks there (KI 1).

Some international events are co-organised with other centres, the most important one being Victoria Falls:

We shared with Victoria Falls in hosting the SADC conference. Of course the conference was hosted in Victoria Falls, but all the procurement was done in Harare, and we hosted the delegates for more days than in Victoria Falls. Because we are under one hotel chain, it's easier to work together and in most cases we are the service providers of conferences hosted in Victoria Falls (KI 4).

When it comes to domestic business events, political events play a key and dominant role. The respondents pointed out that it is always safer to host political meetings aligned with the ruling party:

We have a lot of political conferences. But they are mostly ministerial planning sessions and ZANU PF's conference only. We cannot host any other political conference that is not in line with the ruling party (KI 10).

Such political influence impacts the manner in which the business events sector operates. Stakeholders indicated that the political conferences they host are highly profitable. One informant indicated that:

We are always hosting political conferences. We recently hosted the ZANU PF youth conference that took four days. There are a lot of Ministries strategy sessions, we share with conference centres at Victoria Falls (KI 3).

The role played by travel organizers was disclosed as significant for the organization of these domestic business events. It was stated that:

Our services are to host the meetings and conferences, not to organize them. We simply offer the service and facility for the success of the conferences. The tour operators and the travel agents do the organization and they are our clients while the conference delegates are just our guests. This makes our business easier (KI 3).

In addition to political events the city's business events sector regularly attracts private sector and organizational meetings, conferences that are not politically based.

The conferences we host at domestic level are generally political, religious and organizational conferences. In Zimbabwe generally, those are the three main conferences you will see being hosted in big hotels and conference centres. Apart from those, you can have music concerts (KI 1).

We always host many of the domestic organizations at least once or twice in a month. We don't have too much competition because there are few hotels in Harare with bigger conference facilities to host such conferences. Sometimes even the University of Zimbabwe hosts some international conferences (KI 2).

Religious conferences bring a lot of profits because our hotel operates to full capacity when they happen. When we host big religious names like Pastor Makandiwa and Prophet Magaya, our hotel will have a 100% occupancy rate. Religious conferences are such a big thing in our operations. Then we have political conferences, these come in different forms from youth leagues to ministerial conferences, and the good thing about these is that we have a yearly calendar of political events that we host (KI 4).

In summary, hotels in Harare host a variety of events, including political, religious and business events as well as health conferences. As a venue for domestic events, Harare often competes with other urban centres in Zimbabwe, most importantly, with Victoria Falls. Arguably, the character of the city's business tourism sector is strongly affected by the country's political environment.

5.3. Local Development Impacts

The interviews provide evidence of important local impacts resulting from the growth and operations of Harare as a destination for MICE business tourism. As has been observed in African tourism research, existing studies on impacts that

reduce the level of poverty are mainly conducted in relation to leisure tourism. Only recently has there been a growing interest in how business tourism in African cities can achieve the same goals (Coles & Mitchell, 2009; Rogerson, 2014). Given the distressed character of Zimbabwean economy and the high levels of poverty and unemployment in Harare, the following subsection focuses on the pro-poor impacts of the MICE tourism sector in Harare.

The most direct impact is the provision of formal employment opportunities in the city whose manufacturing sector has experienced a major decline. The hospitality sector in Harare is one of the few formal sectors offering employment for job seekers in the city.

Employment is a big problem in Zimbabwe because industry is no longer as effective as before. But ours [hospitality] offers job opportunities every time, from low to high skills (KI 10).

Zimbabwe is typically a country without jobs. Our industry only employs just about 8–10% of the entire Zimbabwean workforce. The root to this unemployment issues can be anything from political to economic. The hospitality industry is doing its best to address this employment gap, but it's not enough (KI 5).

The respondents were also asked to express their opinions about unemployment in Harare and how the hospitality industry was addressing it:

The hotel industry in Zimbabwe is the highest employer, and we employ people from low skills level which makes us the top in balancing the employment equity in the country (KI 2).

It is not a secret that productivity of many industries in Zimbabwe is down and jobs are scarce. When we speak of unemployment levels, they keep rising every day and there are many unemployed graduates who have turned to informal business practices to fight poverty in their families. Our industry is only one of the few industries in the country that is absorbing the graduates (KI 5).

As follows from the above, the hotels and convention centres in Harare play a vital role as employers on the local labour market, though they are not able to absorb the growing number of unemployed graduates in the city.

Altogether we have 234 Zimbabwean employees in the hotel. 134 are permanently employed, and 100 are on short term contracts... All senior positions are 100% held by Zimbabwean citizens, including the hotel senior manager (KI 1).

The Zimbabwean citizens employed in this hotel are 300. There are 198 male employees and 102 females. 7 of them are living with disability. We have 15 Zimbabweans who are working as interns and they are not part of the 300. All the senior positions in the hotel are occupied by Zimbabweans, with 5 women senior managers and only one senior manager living with a disability (K1 6).

The respondents were also asked if they had employment strategies or policies with guidelines on the employment of women, youth and other vulnerable population groups in Zimbabwe. Responses indicate that women and vulnerable populations are prioritized. There are women and people with disabilities in high positions and employment rates for local residents are high. The MICE sector is also an important employer of people with low skills.

Our employment strategy dovetails those of the country's labour laws. We do promote the empowerment of the vulnerable groups, but obviously they have to be qualified or have some experience in the job they apply (K1 2).

However, the low wages in Harare's hospitality sector are in many cases insufficient to combat the phenomenon of poverty-in-employment:

Poverty is getting worse every day in our country, it's affecting even our employees because the salaries are not enough. Sometimes we give the employees food stuffs and materials to support their families. Our company policy and the safety and security act forbids us to let employees take left overs home due to related health issues. But we are aware the employees break that law. I do understand their actions because of poverty because I am living here and experiencing everyday just like them (K1 4).

We do not have a direct plan or strategy for dealing with poverty, remember we are a business. But our social programs involve our commitment to help reduce poverty in Zimbabwe (K1 10).

Overall there is evidence of strategies and policies that exist in Harare hotels and conference centers that promote the employment of vulnerable population groups. In addition to the pro-poor local impacts of hospitality employment in Harare, including for vulnerable groups, another set of positive impacts from the formal business tourism economy relate to corporate social responsibility (CSR) projects. In that regard, the sector was found to be involved in a number of community engagement programmes directed towards improving the livelihoods of vulnerable populations in the city. A typical response about CSR programmes was as follows:

Our hotel has a food programme in which we feed six old aged homes across Zimbabwe on a monthly basis. We also sponsor food to boarding schools and to orphanages in Harare. Also, we have quite a few public schools where we have feeding schemes for underprivileged school children (KI 1).

Poverty is an immediate challenge in Zimbabwe and it keeps getting worse. In our initiatives, we are always having briefings with the senior management and major shareholders on how we can help fight the poverty not in the city but in the entire country. This is not just about Harare, and we are aware of it. Generally everyone in Zimbabwe who is not a politician is poor and it is worse in the rural areas. On a monthly basis, we deliver groceries to 25 foster families and orphanages around the country, only three of them are in Harare (KI 3).

Besides CSR programmes and projects related to the SDGs, hotels and convention centres in Harare are involved in other pro-poor initiatives that are part of their social commitment.

Our biggest social responsibility I think is that we offer employment opportunities for Zimbabweans. Besides this, our hotel is committed to working with communities, for example we normally buy horticultural products from some of the community members in many areas around the Manicaland Province. Dealing with local farmers for us is our strategy to include them in the supply and value chain of the hospitality sector in Zimbabwe (KI 4).

We are involved in recreational activities also where we sponsor schools sport activities and providing recreational facilities for sporting activities. For example, we help in the maintenance of the Harare Sports Club (KI 5).

Regarding the contribution made by the business tourism sector to poverty alleviation in Harare, the respondents mentioned several regulatory problems and raised concerns about the repression of the informal sector in Harare (see Rogerson, 2016).

One of the major challenges we are facing here is the treatment of the informal traders who come to sell art works and other souvenirs around our facilities during conferences and exhibitions. These people used to help in making the conference experience of our guests more exciting, but now the police raid them and they have taken away that pleasure from our guest (KI 1).

The above responses signal that the regulatory environment which affects the operations of the business tourism economy in Harare reduces the capacity of the business tourism sector to have a more positive impact on reducing poverty in the city.

6. Conclusion

Research on business tourism continues to attract attention from tourism scholars in the Global North (Borodako et al., 2019; Celuch, 2019; Davidson, 2019; Bik, Poreda & Matczak, 2020; Arcodia, 2023; Carvalho, 2023; Celuch, 2023). In the Global South, however, it remains a somewhat neglected theme despite its significance in many leading urban tourism destinations (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2021b). The need for an extended scholarship on business tourism is particularly acute in major cities of sub-Saharan Africa, where business tourism is frequently of greater significance than leisure tourism (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2021c). This article contributes to addressing the knowledge gap on business tourism in urban Africa with its focus on MICE tourism in Harare, Zimbabwe's capital city.

The findings were based on qualitative interviews which were conducted with stakeholders at the convention centre and all hotels in the city that have conference facilities. It was shown that Harare has a MICE infrastructure which can accommodate both international and domestic business events. The competitiveness of Harare for such business tourism is constrained by infrastructural shortcomings relating to unreliable supplies of electricity and water. Despite the economic and political turmoil experienced in Zimbabwe since 2000, there is observed resilience in the hotels and conference centres that are the heart of this business tourism economy. It was evident, however, that political circumstances in Zimbabwe have constrained the city's capacity to host international business events. Arguably, politics have also influenced aspects of the nature of domestic business events in the city. It was shown that politics plays a major role in the decisions made by the conference centres in Harare to host particular domestic business events associated with the ruling party. Beyond political events linked to the government, Harare has also been the focus of other events, most notably of large religious gatherings. These domestic and international events in the city have been a core support for the hotel economy of Harare, including of those accommodation service establishments that do not have conference facilities.

In the final analysis the local impacts of the formal business sector must be viewed as highly significant in the Harare economy and, most especially, in light

of the drastic hollowing out of formal employment opportunities in other economic sectors. Of importance is the observed pro-poor impacts of the economy of MICE tourism through its employment prospects as well as the impact of CSR programmes which are directed assistance to vulnerable groups in the city. These pro-poor impacts of business tourism in this African city are particularly important given the weak state of Harare's formal economy and the existence of high levels of poverty amongst the urban population as a whole. More research needs to be conducted in the future to quantify the impact of MICE tourism in African cities.

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Turystyka biznesowa w miastach afrykańskich na przykładzie Harare w Zimbabwe

Streszczenie. Zagadnienia turystyki biznesowej cieszą się coraz większym zainteresowaniem badaczy z globalnej Północy. Ciągłe jednak prowadzi się zbyt mało podobnych badań w krajach globalnego Południa pomimo tego, że turystyka biznesowa odgrywa ważną rolę w wielu wiodących ośrodkach turystyki miejskiej. Potrzeba takich badań jest szczególnie widoczna w odniesieniu do dużych miast Afryki Subsaharyjskiej, gdzie sektor turystyki biznesowej ma często większe znacze-

nie niż turystyka wypoczynkowa. Artykuł jest próbą uzupełnienia luki w wiedzy na temat turystyki biznesowej (MICE) na terenie ośrodków miejskich w Afryce, na przykładzie Harare, stolicy Zimbabwe. Badanie opiera się na danych zabranych podczas wywiadów jakościowych z respondentami reprezentującymi wszystkie hotele w Harare, które posiadają zaplecze umożliwiające organizację wydarzeń biznesowych. Badanie koncentruje się na konkurencyjności gospodarki turystyki biznesowej w stolicy, charakterze organizowanych w mieście wydarzeń biznesowych i wpływie turystyki biznesowej na sytuację osób dotkniętych ubóstwem.

Słowa kluczowe: turystyka biznesowa, sektor MICE, turystyka miejska, konkurencyjność, korzyści dla biednych



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