

## Enablers and Barriers to Public-Private Partnerships for Inclusive Tourism Development in South Africa

### Abstract

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This study aimed to determine how public-private partnerships could be used to promote inclusive tourism development in South Africa. Using the case of partnerships forged through Airbnb in the Waterberg biosphere region. Adopting a qualitative approach, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were held with individuals involved in the planning and hosting the Airbnb Entrepreneurship Academy, Airbnb partners and academy graduates. Findings reveal that the aligned interest of local stakeholders and the need for alternative planning and development approaches enabled the establishment and implementation of partnerships for fostering inclusive tourism. However, challenges posed by these partnerships included a lack of tourism knowledge and the lack of resources, which further posed challenges in maintaining the positive outcomes of Airbnb's intervention. Moreover, the findings highlight how public-private partnerships increased the advocacy for inclusive tourism and the sharing economy. The study concludes that while public-private partnerships played a pivotal role in fostering inclusive tourism growth, these partnerships need to be aligned with destination development needs.

**Keywords:** Inclusive tourism, public-private partnerships, tourism development, Airbnb

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### Introduction

Inclusive tourism is understood as tourism that promotes local development by being inclusive of low- and middle-income population groups, aiming to reduce income inequality (Butler & Rogerson, 2016). The concept of inclusive tourism development is based on the premise that tourism development can, in fact, be inclusive and aid in efforts to reduce poverty if all stakeholders involved in the tourism value chain contribute to the creation of opportunities for all, allowing all to share in the benefits of tourism-related activities. According to the South African Green Paper on the Development and Promotion of Tourism in South Africa (2023), an inclusive South African tourism sector can be achieved through increased skills development, entrepreneurship, and financial support. To promote tourism inclusivity, there is a need for leveraging innovation to create compelling experiences, building partnerships to strengthen the sector's impact nationally, regionally and globally, addressing barriers to tourism growth, and aligning with the countries' social development and cohesion initiatives (South Africa, 2023). Overall, inclusive tourism development is a multi-dimensional concept that involves overcoming barriers to access to the tourism sector, widening the range of people who have tourism decision-making powers, and putting new places on the tourism map, all in a way that allows the benefits of tourism to be shared (Kadi et al., 2022). Unfortunately, given the novelty of inclusive tourism, it has not yet been meaningfully investigated in tourism literature, with much of the available studies being conceptual and theoretical in nature (see Bakker et al., 2020; Bianchi & de Man, 2021; Biddulph & Scheyvens, 2018), with a few that have focused on host communities (see Bichler, 2021; Dangi & Petrick, 2021; Jani, 2022). Accordingly, this study adds to the current literature through an empirical investigation of inclusive tourism, considering the role of public-private partnerships (PPPs).

The call for tourism stakeholder collaboration has led to PPPs becoming an essential tool in local development (Razin et al., 2022) as well as a widely promising approach for inclusivity in tourism settings (Cockburn-Wooten et al., 2018; Biddulph & Scheyvens, 2018). PPPs have long been promoted in the tourism industry for their ability to affect meaningful change through the combination of resources, risk, and capacities (Graci, 2013; Razin et al., 2022). This paper focuses on Airbnb and its intervention in the Waterberg District of South Africa to drive economic transformation and inclusive tourism growth through numerous PPPs. This intervention was grounded in Airbnb's inclusive tourism commitment, through which the multinational company pledged to support a diverse and inclusive tourism sector in South Africa by hosting the Airbnb Entrepreneurship Academy. This inclusive tourism commitment acknowledges that digital platforms such as Airbnb are vital in achieving inclusive growth in the tourism sector by lowering barriers to entry to tourism entrepreneurship. The operationalisation of this commitment required buy-in, support, and collaboration with several stakeholders. As such, the current study sought to determine how PPPs, created by Airbnb, have played a role in developing and promoting inclusive tourism. In doing so, the study evaluates the development and implementation of PPPs with Airbnb to derive enablers and barriers of such partnerships for attaining inclusive tourism growth, outcomes of partnerships, and guiding principles that can be used in future private-public partnerships.

### Literature review

#### *Inclusive tourism development in South Africa*

Inclusive tourism is defined by Biddulph & Scheyvens (2018) as transformative tourism in which marginalised groups are engaged in the industry in the ethical production and consumption of tourism and can share in its benefits. The authors add that effective inclusive tourism development must involve less powerful and marginalised groups (Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018).



This form of tourism is often considered a response to economic, social and spatial disparities trends, excluding certain groups from the tourism economy. Historically, the concept of inclusive tourism has come under extensive debate and scrutiny as it is largely based on the premise that tourism development is inclusive of all income groups, ultimately reducing societal inequalities, which has very often not been the case (Rendon & Bidwell, 2014; Butler & Rogerson, 2016). In terms of how tourism businesses operate, those that are inclusive create employment opportunities and income across the tourism value chain, positively impacting local communities and allowing lower income population groups access to opportunities that stimulate poverty alleviation (Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018). In South Africa, inclusive tourism development is a much-contested topic due to the legacy of Apartheid, resulting in the tourism industry being largely white-dominated, the acknowledgement of the tourism industry, and the limited involvement of Black communities in tourism consumption and product development (Rogerson & Visser, 2004; Hanekom, 2015; Butler & Rogerson, 2016). In the broader African context, tourism has continuously provided opportunities for business and leisure for only the privileged and middle class, generating profits for larger companies and creating exclusive destinations for the rich (Gibson, 2009; Jamal & Camargo, 2014; Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018). Additionally, local communities often lack the resources, skills, capital and networks to engage with tourists through their own initiatives (Biddulph, 2015), facing high levels of discrimination. Today, many tourism products are still built on societal differences between the rich and the poor and between different cultures, a gap that tourism tends to exploit as wealthy tourists visit 'primitive' poorer areas as tourist attractions (Scheyvens, 2011; Biddulph, 2015).

In order to address these challenges, the South African government launched several initiatives since the dawn of democracy in 1994 to restructure the tourism industry and promote the involvement of Black communities therein. These strategies have included the promotion of Black Economic Empowerment (BEE), applying pro-poor approaches to tourism development projects, and collaborating with private sector organisations (Rogerson, 2006). In essence, inclusive tourism development in South Africa can be seen as the development of tourism that provides greater benefits for local previously disadvantaged communities who have formerly remained on the margins of the tourism industry, with the government and the private sector collaboratively playing an active role in this change. In their work, Scheyvens & Biddulph (2018) argue that, for inclusive tourism development to take place successfully, the questions which should be asked relates to who is included or excluded in tourism development, and on what terms are they either included or excluded. When answering these questions, the answers should be viewed through the lens of overcoming barriers to entry into the tourism industry for previously disadvantaged groups, facilitating self-representation for those who have been previously marginalised, challenging existing power relations, widening the range of people who contribute to tourism decision making; placing new destinations on the existing tourism map; and encouraging the development of partnerships within the industry (Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018). When putting inclusive tourism into practice, what needs to be considered is that marginalised groups of people should be viewed as tourism producers as well as consumers, making the industry less exclusive, allowing for the breaking of barriers between ethnic groups, increased appreciation of culture, enhanced national pride, the revitalisation of social ties and the spread of economic benefits (Mawdsley, 2009).

### ***The role of PPP in tourism development***

According to the World Tourism Organisation [WTO] (2015), PPPs are partnerships that bring together stakeholders with a wide range of goals, resources and skills, either in an informal or formal partnership, to improve tourism destinations' productivity, attractiveness, efficiency and management. Graci (2013) adds that PPPs are cooperative arrangements between the public and private sectors, bringing together tourism stakeholders with different resources, skills, requirements and objectives to improve levels of tourism development (Neupane, 2021). Within tourism, Graci (2013) advocates that PPP stakeholders should have clear roles and responsibilities for reaching a common goal, be independent and self-regulated, be able to solve problems constructively, have joint ownership of all decisions made, and bear collective responsibility for the future of a destination (Graci, 2013). In tourism, PPPs are notably important for development as while the industry is largely public-led, it is private sector-driven (Deladem et al., 2021). Hall (2008) adds that these partnerships are also essential to tourism development as the public sector alone does not have the capacity to manage the various sectors of the tourism industry. Although largely successful in promoting inclusive tourism development, PPPs have proven challenging to form in the tourism industry, usually evolving slowly over long periods of time (Wan et al., 2022). This has also been the case due to the traditionally fragmented nature of tourism products within destinations. Some of the most commonly faced challenges encountered in the formation of PPPs in the tourism industry include overestimated project costs, lengthy procurement processes; public agencies and private bidders without sufficient competencies, inflexible long-term contracts with unclear objectives, increasing project costs and complex organisational structures; and delays in project implementation (Deladem et al., 2021). The WTO (2011) notes that if these challenges can be overcome. Partnerships successfully forged, the competitive advantage of tourism destinations can be improved. The range of organisations involved in tourism development can be enhanced to include those previously excluded from the industry.

### ***The case of Airbnb's intervention in the Waterberg***

In terms of the case study, Airbnb had three primary objectives for their intervention in the Waterberg to (1) drive inclusive tourism through skills development (the Airbnb Entrepreneurship Academy), (2) enable digital access through free WIFI, and (3) partner-led destination promotion to create awareness of the unique offering of the Waterberg. The skills development through the Entrepreneurship Academy was premised on showcasing the opportunities within tourism and hospitality, providing practical learning on how to establish their own experiences or list their homes on the app and how to market and



position their offerings. By the end of the second boot camp, Airbnb had (i) trained 51 individuals resulting in 41 live listings (80% of graduates), (ii) facilitated professional copywriting to 30 graduates, (iii) provided professional photography to 31 graduates, and (iv) provided more than 285 hours of mentoring to graduates. The second objective of Airbnb's intervention in the Waterberg District was to increase digital access for Airbnb participants. Many parts of the Waterberg region are remote, and coupled with load-shedding challenges, many tourism entrepreneurs face connectivity issues. As such, to address these challenges, Airbnb partnered up with Ikeja to increase connectivity in the Waterberg region. Furthermore, Airbnb also provided WIFI routers and UPS devices for graduates of the Academy at the graduation ceremony, which enabled them to stay online even during load shedding. In total, Airbnb provided 38 free WIFI connections and UPS devices. The third objective was centred on creating a destination promotion campaign for the Waterberg region. As the Waterberg was primarily a mining region, having only transitioned to sustainable growth through inclusive tourism, the region has a low tourism presence. The major tourism assets in the Waterberg comprise the wilderness landscapes, owing to the rich biodiversity, number of game farms and reserves, and cultural experiences. The destination promotion campaign was executed in two phases. The first phase showcased the work done by Airbnb (and partners) in driving inclusive tourism in the District, and the second phase centred on shining a spotlight on the broader Waterberg region and its tourism appeal. In the first phase, Airbnb's inclusive tourism commitment was displayed alongside the graduation ceremony of Academy participants on Twitter. In phase two, the media content illuminated the hosts and unique listings in the Waterberg, all speaking to the theme of sustainability, and was shared on various social media platforms. In addition, Airbnb also partnered with Go Magazine to create some digital banners, which were also shared alongside the images and videos on the three social media platforms.

Airbnb's involvement in the Waterberg District was initiated by two key partners, the Public Private Growth Initiative (PPGI) and the District Municipality. PPGI, a voluntary platform created to foster cooperation and collaboration between the private sector and government to promote inclusive growth, introduced and facilitated the partnership with Airbnb and the District Municipality. During the initial discussions, the district municipal government was already planning its new district development model with a high emphasis on PPPs for economic transformation in the region. The municipality assisted with several activities with Airbnb, including raising awareness of the Airbnb Academy. Other partners included (i) the Waterberg Biosphere, a non-profit organisation (and a UNESCO-declared site) that champions environmental education and awareness in the Biosphere area by promoting the equitable use of natural resources and sustainable tourism development, (ii) the Laphalala Wilderness School, an educational centre at the 48,000 hectare Big Five nature reserve (iii) Women in Tourism (Limpopo), an initiative that propels and supports the development and empowerment of women in the tourism sector, (iv) Limpopo Tourism, a non-governmental organisation that markets and supports the development of tourism in Limpopo, and (v) Endangered Wildlife Trust, a non-governmental, not-for-profit South African conservation organisation. These partners assisted in promoting the Airbnb Academy, providing consultation to Airbnb in their interventions, and assisting in the marketing campaigns of the graduates and the region.

## Methodology

The current study was conducted in the Waterberg Region, in the Limpopo province of South Africa. The Waterberg District is a region transitioning from mining to tourism, with the tourism offerings centred on the natural and cultural richness therein. An exploratory, qualitative research design was employed to achieve the study's objectives and provide deeper insights into how public-private partnerships in the region have impacted inclusive tourism development. The use of a qualitative research approach was deemed necessary owing to the scant understanding of PPPs and the fact that an in-depth exploratory approach is best suited to understanding PPPs and inclusive tourism in the Global South (Razin et al., 2022). Data for the study was collected from three groups of participants – representatives from Airbnb who facilitate the Airbnb Entrepreneurship Academy, Airbnb partners working within the Waterberg Biosphere, and local graduates of the Airbnb Entrepreneurship Academy. A purposive sampling approach was used to identify participant groups. The final sample for the study included 4 Airbnb representatives from which data was collected through a focus group; 8 Airbnb partners with in-depth interviews were held, and 23 Airbnb Entrepreneurship Academy graduates with group and individual interviews conducted. In total, the study sample included 35 study participants. The interview guides used were designed to elucidate rich and in-depth insights from participants. The interview schedule was developed by reviewing the literature on PPPs in tourism and inclusive tourism. The questions centred on the role of partners in the project, their views on the barriers and enablers of partnerships for inclusive tourism, and the lessons learned from this intervention. Data was collected in November 2023 and analysed using the Atlas.ti software programme. The data analysis produced several themes related to the workings of PPPs, which are discussed below.

## Results

### *Leveraging existing local institutions*

A strong enabler of public-private partnerships in fostering inclusive tourism growth in the Waterberg District was the aligned interest of partners. The write-up of Airbnb's intervention in the Waterberg and subsequent outcomes revealed much to have been achieved in making a meaningful impact towards inclusive tourism in the region through providing access for marginalised groups to become tourism producers, offering additional assistance for their newly established enterprises as well as drawing more marketing attention to the region and capitalising on the proximity to Johannesburg, a major metropolitan city. When asked about the enablers of inclusive tourism in the Waterberg District, several participants mentioned the importance of having several tourism structures (i.e., tourism officials in the District Municipality, tourism marketing bodies, tourism associations, and other local tourism organisations) and partners whose collaboration was crucial in Airbnb's intervention in the district.



Some partners affirmed that further collaborations among the partners and stakeholders could be instrumental in continuing the work started by Airbnb; for instance, one partner stated:

I would say partners and collaboration. So, the enablers will be all those partners within the [tourism] umbrella. What are you bringing in? When do we bring them together? Can we then lift this one? That's why we've got the likes of Waterberg and tourism and the Limpopo tourism agency. The biosphere reserve can bring in LTA [Limpopo Tourism Association], LEDET [Limpopo Economic Development, Environment, and Tourism], the national department, and local communities. So, in a way, it brings everybody together to share experiences.

Airbnb was able to leverage these interests, with important partnerships formed, and work with these partners on attaining the three objectives.

#### ***Alternative planning and management approaches***

The apparent need for alternative planning and management approaches drove the establishment of public-private partnerships in the Waterberg. Accordingly, it is important to recognise partners such as PPGI, a key player in facilitating private-public partnerships. In this regard, a representative of the PPGI explained:

So, there was no one bringing all these partners together. You know, [the] government talks about partnerships and public-private partnerships, but it's a tried word; they just use this expression. I don't even think they know what they truly mean. So essentially, we started getting partners into the Waterberg and because of our national footprint, we were also able to appeal to people who have nothing to do with the Waterberg to say, "Hey, this is a presidential District Development pilot. Do you guys want to come in" and you know, and refer people are really people are hungry, to do things, especially where they will be supported from a policy and regulatory point of view by the government.

The District Municipality and Airbnb partnership strongly aligned with the District Development Model. Specifically, the drive to increase private-public partnerships in reducing silo approach to planning and development and foster collaboration for effective service delivery. Once agreed upon, this led to the partnering up with local stakeholders to realise the Academy. The partnership with Airbnb also extended to industry collaboration in policy development, primarily the Green Paper on Tourism. Furthermore, this collaboration highlighted (and addressed) some red tape that adversely hindered residents from turning their homes into homestays in Airbnb. A representative from the Airbnb team explained:

The Waterberg district municipality was an interesting partner beyond only skills development and marketing because they also became aware of what kind of red tape is in place for homes bought for like, for example, a homestay, and they were then very easily able to advise participants on how to avoid this red tape and become a host.

#### ***Lack of tourism knowledge***

Overwhelmingly, there was a concurrence amongst stakeholders interviewed on the lack of tourism knowledge in local municipal offices. Participants explained that, to a large extent, tourism is still understood as tour guiding and booking flights and accommodation, and the linkages of tourism to other economic sectors are not well known, as well as how to leverage the local linkages for socio-economic development. Accordingly, this lack of understanding of tourism is a wide-scale concern and has been postulated to have resulted in a lack of support for this economic sector in the local municipalities. Some participants lamented that these municipalities resultantly support other sectors, such as agriculture, more as supported by the following quote:

Not knowing what tourism is regarding tourism activities or development within the town. And another thing is that you find that there are no programmes, such as [what] Airbnb has done. There aren't many opportunities. Also, people don't know what tourism is because they still [view] it as tour guiding, booking flights, and seeing the world. Domestic tourism is not really marketed. There is a need for more training among the youth. People still think it's for certain people.

Evidently, the lack of support from local municipalities (and district municipalities, according to a few participants) means little funding for tourism, limited skills development opportunities, or even networking opportunities. A few participants contributed further insights by drawing attention to the existing inefficiencies (related to insufficient skills and knowledge) in local government, which are exacerbated concerning the tourism industry. These concerns reemphasise the importance of PPPs at all levels of government to foster better capacity and knowledge as well as some resource constraints (Razin et al., 2022).

#### ***Lack of resources in tourism structures***

Relatedly, several participants mentioned the lack of resources in institutional structures. Several institutional actors exist that could provide further support for the graduates in their tourism endeavours after the academy. Several partners in the interviews are non-profit organisations (such as Waterberg Tourism, Lapalala Wilderness School, and Waterberg Biosphere) and thereby



lack the resources to effectively assist the progression of Airbnb graduates and attend to the gaps noted in the program, such as the additional skills development financial management, as explained by a representative from the Lapalala Wilderness School:

We also pick up gaps because some of them have graduates who might need some skills that could really assist their businesses in flourishing. Things like finance for non-finance managers need to be able to understand budgeting and all those kinds of things, which we see as a gap. Nevertheless, because funding is an issue, and as a non-profit organisation, we can do things that we can based on where we find a surplus, but if we don't have a surplus in certain aspects, we might not be able to do it.

Further, another representative from Limpopo Tourism similarly added the resource constraints affecting their operations and, subsequently, how they can support tourism in the Waterberg District:

A lot of organisations in the area are NPOs. So, they mostly rely on funders; they mostly rely on donations and trusts to be active and do their work on a daily basis. However, now, if you don't have the resources, you don't have the means even to run an office like Waterberg tourism itself has to run in office. So, if they don't have funds, someone will have to stay home. So, resources will be one of the of the barriers.

The quotes above demonstrate the complexity that exists in PPPs in contexts such as the Waterberg, as resource constraints impede the goodwill and intention to contribute meaningfully towards inclusive growth. While the findings clearly showcase the positive effect of the Academy and the broader Airbnb interventions, the contention is that there are crucial gaps that were now being identified in hindsight.

### ***Outcomes of Airbnb's PPPs***

In addition to the accomplishments of Airbnb's intervention in the Waterberg, discussions with participants revealed that there have been other noteworthy and unanticipated positive outcomes. Indeed, the study uncovered that the partnerships driven by Airbnb raised a lot of awareness from several stakeholders about the sharing economy, specifically short-term rentals. A representative of the Airbnb team had the following to say:

I think they might not have been that aware [of] how it all works. And because they actually participated in the training, they actually understood it and then became advocates [for] the program. And I think later on, there was a green paper where they wanted commentary that, like the National Department of Tourism, and there it was amazing. You know, many of the partners in the Waterberg actually stood up for short-term rentals. A lot of the participants actually spoke in the first person about their experience of becoming a host. I think that was a real benefit of one of the partnerships that wasn't necessarily related to marketing or skills development. It was more like advocacy in general.

Further, key stakeholders such as the District Municipality and the Waterberg Biosphere mention these partnerships to fast-track much-needed tourism development, particularly in increasing safety and cleanliness in townships as well as leveraging Airbnb's scale and reach to market the Waterberg District as an attractive and distinctive destination. These sentiments are exemplified in the following quotes from a representative of the District Municipality and the Waterberg Biosphere:

And that is why, from our side, we saw this partnership as an incentive that put us on our toes to say, 'Let's keep our townships clean and acceptable to whoever is going to come and consume the tourism services being provided in those spaces' and ensuring that people are not going to be worried if they will to be safe.

The biosphere reserve has always been looking into how best we can sell the Waterberg as a destination. And we didn't know the how part, we just knew that we wanted tourists to come to the Waterberg, but the question was, why? Why should someone come to Waterberg when they can go to Kruger [National Park]? Why not go to Mapungubwe? So, this partnership required us to ask, 'what is in the Waterberg', and we started to realise that there is just so much. Some unique species are within the Waterberg that were hidden. Things are starting to show up because of the relationship that we had with Airbnb.

### ***Public-private partnership principles for inclusive tourism***

Several lessons could be learned from Airbnb's partnerships and intervention in the Waterberg region on public-private partnerships for inclusive tourism. One of the first recommendations mentioned in the interviews was that partnerships must be embedded in shared principles. While partnerships around the Academy were generally considered successful, some concerns emerged. Some participants identified red tape bureaucracy (i.e., the MoU signing process took a long) and the lack of tourism expertise at the local municipal level. At the same time, other partners acknowledged that more could have been done on their part in the partnership but were restrained in terms of resources and other commitments. In this regard, some participants noted that PPPs must be grounded on intentionality and accountability; for instance, a Women in Tourism Association representative underlined "...important to regularly host meetings and set priorities and deadlines within milestones. And holding each other accountable".



## Discussion

The study's results present the enablers and barriers of PPPs for inclusive tourism growth. One of the most forthcoming enablers of the success of Airbnb's intervention in the Waterberg was the ability to garner the support and partnerships of local institutions. As indicated in the results, the Waterberg has a number of local institutions with already common goals on economic transformation, inclusive tourism, conservation, and community development. However, these institutions were working in isolation, which is a common challenge in tourism development in many developing and emerging destinations. The case study on Airbnb highlights the importance of partnerships and collaboration for inclusive tourism and having certain stakeholders and their influence participating to ensure successful and effective partnerships. In the case of Airbnb in the Waterberg, the impetus of Airbnb's intervention was driven by PPGI approaching both Airbnb and the District Municipality, which tied Airbnb's interest in gaining credibility with policymakers in South Africa as well as the district government's mandate to leverage private sector partners to attain socioeconomic goals. The study's findings suggest that effective public-private partnerships in rural and developing regions require various partners with varying levels of influence and stature. For instance, the legitimacy of PPGI as a partner (backed by its nationally recognised and supported mandate) not only connected public and tourism stakeholders but the global reputation of Airbnb (and its resources) enabled this company to bring together various local partners for their intervention. This highlights the significance of influence and stature in stakeholder partners and how these attributes can be leveraged to affect positive change. This enabled local institutions such as (Waterberg Biosphere and Laphalala Wilderness School) to learn from this intervention process. Importantly, this convergence of various knowledge, experience, and operations led to a rethinking of policy and strategy development, which is remarkable in terms of changing laws and regulations in rural settings to match the global movement of society (i.e., the sharing economy).

Additionally, the importance of knowledge and capacity emerged frequently in the interview discussion with the numerous stakeholders. The lack of capacity in local government is a well document concern (see, for instance, Razin et al., 2022; Ruhanen, 2013; Shone et al., 2016), with partnerships with the private sector deemed crucial to assist in improving capacities as well as resource constraints. It is important to note that Airbnb's partnership was with the District government, and not Local government, which may have resulted in this important stakeholder group still unaware and unknowledgeable with tourism, and how to assist emerging tourism entrepreneurs in their municipalities better. Considering that effective governance ensures that an enabling environment is created and maintained for the tourism businesses (Ndivo & Okech, 2020), the situation in the Waterberg is exacerbated by the fact that it is in a transitional period, and tourism is not a traditional and well-known sector in many rural regions. The importance of including a variety of partners in inclusive tourism developments was further underscored by Hanekom (2015), who added that for inclusive tourism development in South Africa to successfully take place, the various spheres of government in the country need to support this through infrastructural improvements, enhanced support for SMMEs and support for local skills development.

Undeniably, Airbnb substantially contributed to fostering an inclusive tourism industry in the Waterberg. Butler & Rogerson (2016) stress that inclusive tourism development can only be achieved and make a contribution towards the reduction of poverty if it is facilitated through an extensive network of partnerships between public and private stakeholders, creating opportunities and ensuring that the benefits of tourism are fairly distributed. However, sentiments by many (if not all) of the stakeholder groups (excluding Airbnb representatives) were on the short-term nature of this intervention. For emerging tourism destinations, the study findings suggest that while short-term interventions may assist in fast-tracking development, the long-term development of tourism entrepreneurs requires a long-term approach, especially considering very few SMMEs can grow and break out from this category (World Economic Forum, 2023; Nieuwenhuizen, 2019). Unfortunately, the lack of resources in local institutions is a barrier to continuing with the work started by Airbnb. In terms of principles to guide PPPs, the study findings pointed to accountability, commitment, communication and trust. Other studies on private-public partnerships in other sectors alluded to the same principles (see, for example, Mashwama et al., 2018). Interestingly, in this case, the importance of trust came out strongly, particularly between Airbnb and certain partners, suggesting an inherent mistrust of external stakeholders may still be prevalent in small and rural regions.

## Conclusion

The current study sought to determine the role that public-private partnerships play in inclusive tourism development in South Africa, considering the case of the Waterberg Biosphere. The partnerships with local stakeholders formed the bedrock for the accomplishments of Airbnb in the Waterberg and produced several key lessons for the development of PPPs for inclusive tourism. The study enablers of partnerships are their aligned individual interests, the recognised need for tourism collaboration in both public and private spheres, and the existence of stakeholders who hold power and influence. Conversely, the barriers to these partnerships related to the lack of tourism knowledge and resources have long-term implications on the continued agenda for inclusive tourism. From a theoretical standpoint, the study contributes to the literature on inclusive tourism and PPPs, particularly as focusing on an emerging and transitioning tourism destination thereby illustrating that the development of partnerships should take into consideration the phase of destination development particularly as inclusive tourism is a long-term goal. Further, the findings suggest that partnerships must be strategically embedded in all governance structures of the destination and that the principles of accountability, collaboration, and trust must be fostered amongst stakeholders to ensure the longevity of the positive outcomes from interventions such as those by Airbnb.



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