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School tours and philanthropy in Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

In Zimbabwe, partnerships with tourism companies enable schools to raise funds for infrastructure in exchange for allowing tourists to enter their school. This paper reports on one school using semi-structured interviews with teachers, school staff and tourism personnel. To shed light on the school tour, it explores three configurations of tours and funding. This paper argues that little is known about this type of tourism and by exploring three configurations of the school tour, it highlights the issues concerned with these types of partnerships and contributes a deeper understanding of these partnerships to the research literature.

1. Introduction

As tourists seek ways to 'give back' or minimise the impact on areas they visit, alternative and niche tourisms are rising in popularity (Hughes & Scheyvens, 2021). These alternative tourisms may include some form of charity, volunteering or seek to alter/disrupt the usual host-guest relationship. Some examples of these tourisms include philanthropic tourism (Lacey, Peel, & Weiler, 2012; Scarth & Novelli, 2019), development tourism (Smithers, 2023a; Baptista, 2011) and corporate social responsibility (Chanakira & Masunda, 2019; Taru & Gukurume, 2013). These niche tourisms range from conservation activities (KC, B., 2020), volunteer tourism (Henry, 2020) to walking safaris (Novelli, Cheer, Dolezal, Jones, & Milano, 2022).

In some tourism destinations, these ideas coalesce in school tours conducted to provide cultural entertainment for the tourists in exchange for philanthropic funds for the host school. Southern Africa is one such location for this type of tourism. Despite continuing popularity among tourists, school tours have received fleeting research attention and are often relegated to a by-product of other types of tourism. As recently as 2019, Scarth and Novelli termed school tourism and associated philanthropy as "compassionate by-products of a wildlife safari" (p. 90). There is a lack of empirical evidence regarding private actors in education, particularly in the Global South (Aubry & Dorsi, 2019). This paper examines one such context, Zimbabwe.

Alongside the continuing economic crisis, the Zimbabwean school system has struggled to cope with the increase in student enrolments since independence in 1980 (Tarisayi & Manik, 2019). There are shortages in resources for schooling such as desks, classrooms and

textbooks (Mwiinde & Muzingili, 2020). To assist with resourcing, the Zimbabwean government have implemented policies to enable funding of schools through public-private partnerships. These partnerships are sourced from a range of areas: foreign donors (Mutambasere, 2022), mining companies (Nhavira, 2019) to tourism (Smithers & Ailwood, 2022a). In schools that partner with tourism companies, there are often arrangements which provide mutually beneficial outcomes for both companies and schools which include school tourism.

This paper identifies and discusses types of tourism that incorporate 'development' as a guiding discourse (Mostafanezhad, 2014). Discourses of development position the Global South as a needy 'other' that must 'develop' to match a European/Global North standard. Aid and philanthropy are intimately tied to notions of development and this coalesces in aid/philanthropy through tourism (Baptista, 2011, Mostafanezhad, 2014; Smithers, 2023a, 2023b). There are a multitude of tensions inherent within forms of tourism that favour discourses of development, although these issues have been discussed elsewhere (c.f., Burns & Barrie, 2005; Koot & Fletcher, 2021; Smithers, 2023a, 2023b).

This paper offers an empirical understanding of school tours by contributing an in-depth assessment of one form of school tour, in combination with a mapping of the variety of school tours that exist in the research literature. This paper examines differing configurations of school tours in one case study school. In examining these configurations, it explores the multiple ways in which a school tour might be conducted and under which conditions funding might be exchanged. It begins with a literature review to outline school tours more broadly. Next, an outline of the research methodology is provided. Third, an in-depth discussion of different funding configurations is provided. Last, it concludes with

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some thematic considerations of the different types of funding arrangements.

2. Literature review

In the past few decades, there has been a splintering and diversification of tourism markets into special interest products and markets (Novelli et al., 2022). Niche tourism products are tailored to meet the demographic, economic and cultural needs of specific markets and as such can be highly variable in nature and size. Novelli et al. (2022) praise niche tourism as a sustainable and ethical alternative to mass tourism; however, others identify the increasing splintering of markets and tourism as creating definitional problems whereby, “terminology can be used as a *camouflage* and may contribute to a mismatch between theory (the terminology) and practice in alternative development approaches” (Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2014, p. 1668). School tours are one such product that fall under a range of niches and micro-niches, making a definition and unpacking of this type of tourism somewhat murky (see also Smithers & Ailwood, 2022a).

There is a growing body of research that identifies tours of schools, or interactions with schools in tourism (see Chilufya, Hughes, & Scheyvens, 2019; Smithers, 2023a, 2023b; Smithers & Ailwood, 2022a). Although this paper has placed studies into categories of types of tourism, it is interesting to note there are significant overlaps between some of the categories. For example, although the study by Burns and Barrie (2005) might be considered community-based tourism, through the use of the local community in decision making, employment and donations to the community, it might also be considered development tourism or philanthropic tourism due to the visits to the site by wealthy donors. Table 1 highlights the differing studies that include school tours and categorises them according to the type of tourism involved.

Cultural tourism is tourism that provides an experience with the cultural ‘Other’ – a cultural spectacle that can be observed or encountered by the tourist. Cultural tourism has been suggested as a tool for development (Ankomah & Larson, 2008) but is not always used for development purposes. Cultural tourism has also been critiqued as a double-edged sword, in which it both maintains and stagnates a culture (Taru & Gukurume, 2013). There are examples of schools being used in cultural tourism. For example, Wilderness Safaris include a visit to a primary school as part of a cultural experience (Ashley & Haysom, 2006). Cultural tourism operators in Zimbabwe encourage tourists to volunteer in local schools (Mutana et al., 2013). Some cultural tourism operators provide donations to schools as a by-product of cultural

Table 1
Previous studies that explore tourism and schools.

Study	Type of tourism
Ankomah and Larson (2008); Ashley and Haysom (2006); Melubo and Carr (2019); Mutana, Chipfuva, and Muchenje (2013); van der Duim, Peters, and Wearing (2005)	Cultural tourism
Burgold and Rolfes (2013); Frenzel and Blakeman (2015)	Slum tourism
Baptista (2011, 2012, 2017); Bassey (2015); Smithers (2023a,b); Smithers and Ailwood (2022a, 2022b);	Development tourism
Koot and Fletcher (2021); Lacey et al. (2012); Lacey, Weiler, and Peel (2014, 2016); Scarth and Novelli (2019, 2024)	Philanthropic tourism/ philanthrotourism
Bargeman, Richards, and Govers (2018); Dolezal and Miezelyte (2020); Henry (2020); Thompson and Taheri (2020)	Volunteer tourism
Burns and Barrie (2005); Mutana et al. (2013); Snyman and Spenceley (2019); Simpson (2009)	Community based tourism/Pro-poor tourism/sustainable tourism
Chilufya et al. (2019); Hughes and Scheyvens (2021)	Corporate Social Responsibility

tourism (Melubo & Carr, 2019; Mutana et al., 2013; van der Duim et al., 2005).

‘Slum’ tourism is a tourism where tourists visit areas experiencing extreme poverty (Burgold & Rolfes, 2013) and for the purposes of this paper, is considered an offshoot of cultural tourism. Slum tours might include a visit to homes, schools and other areas. Frenzel and Blakeman (2015) examined slum tours in India and Kenya and identified a varying level of interaction with local schools during tours, with one company enacting a ‘no photo’ policy and maintaining a strict distance, whilst another allowed tourists to interact with school teachers. Although these studies identify and situate the cultural tourism as a product, school tours are usually mentioned as an aside within a broader cultural product and there is very little focus on the ways the schools are funded through tourism, the longevity of these models or the level of disruption to the schools.

Some tourism products offer tours of areas with the view of integrating philanthropy and development into tourism products as an overt aim. Development tourism is a term coined by Baptista (2011) to recognise the entangling aims of development and tourism in some tourism products. In Mozambique, as part of development tourism village tours, tourists visit schools and are encouraged to donate funds in exchange for tours (Baptista, 2011, 2012). Bassey (2015) lists schools as an opportunity for potential tourism activities that incorporate development. Similar to development tourism is philanthropic tourism. Although similar, philanthropic tourists usually visit a location purely for philanthropic purposes, while development tourists may be visiting for broader cultural purposes, alongside development. Lacey et al. (2016) report on a school funded through philanthropic tourism in Kenya, with donors visiting the school to view how philanthropic funds have been spent. Koot and Fletcher (2021) identify challenges associated with what they term ‘philanthrotourism’, in which donors visit development projects. They identify that philanthrotourism is based on staged spectacles of development, however, their main focus is on the implementation of these tours from an organisation perspective, not from the perspective of schools involved in this type of tourism.

Volunteer tourism incorporates volunteering and more traditional tourism activities. It can incorporate a broad range of volunteer placements, including medical projects, environment projects and education. There are reports of volunteer tourists working in orphanages (Bargeman et al., 2018) and in schools (Bargeman et al., 2018; Henry, 2020; Thompson & Taheri, 2020). Volunteer tourists in schools are not quite ‘touring’ a school but represent a temporary incursion of tourism into the school and may have a high turnover that affects the school’s day-to-day operations (Dolezal & Miezelyte, 2020). It is also not well documented if schools receive any financial benefits from volunteer tourist placements. Although schools as volunteering sites have been identified as the most popular volunteer activity, there is very little research that explores schools as hosts of volunteer tourists; rather, most studies focus on the effects of volunteer tourism as a whole.

Community based tourism is tourism that is designed with the community and developed to provide funds directly back into the community. These types of tourism sometimes incorporate aspects of cultural tourism through the provision of tours, but are different due to the intention of being designed for, and by, the local community. Snyman and Spenceley (2019) provide insight into private tourism partnerships in Southern Africa, using case studies to highlight configurations of tourist lodges alongside social and economic impacts, which sometimes include funding and support of schooling and school tours. Simpson (2009) also provides insight into community development linked to tourism, but largely focus on the impact on residents and the management of the lodge. Although the funding of a school is mentioned by Simpson, there is no consideration made to the structure and formation of the funding, or the arrangements that the school may become obligated to, including how teachers’ daily work may be influenced by tourism. Burns and Barrie (2005) also describe a school funded by donors, with groups visiting the school to check on progress.

Tied to the idea of community-based tourism is the increasing visibility of corporate social responsibility, in which companies provide philanthropic donations to the local community. In Zambia and Fiji, hotels engage in corporate social responsibility through which they provide funds to schools in exchange for school visits (Chilufya et al., 2019). These tours usually include photographs of children and tours of classrooms (Hughes & Scheyvens, 2021) and might also include performances by dance groups. This seems to be a trend in current studies of community development through tourism that focus on the economic and social impacts, as well as providing a business focussed lens.

This literature review has mapped the existing literature to bridge the divide between the different types of tourism and begin a conversation about school tours as their own tourism activity – no matter the type of broader tourism activity they are incorporated into. Based on the current literature, it appears that the incursion of tourism into schooling in the Global South is an almost unquestioned, normalised activity. For example, the idea of visiting a school is sometimes presented as a novel business idea (eg., Bassey, 2015), without consideration of the ethical and moral imperatives of tourism activities that incorporate schools. Some studies identify the neocolonial aspects of this type of tourism (c.f. Baptista, 2011; Koot & Fletcher, 2021; Smithers, 2023a, 2023b), the implications or benefits for tourism companies (Chilufya et al., 2019; Mutana et al., 2013), and the aspects of development that play into these tourisms (c.f. Baptista, 2011; Koot & Fletcher, 2021; Smithers, 2023a, 2023b). This literature review has established that although there are a remarkable number of niches that incorporate school tours as a tourism product, there seems to be little detail on the actualities of implementing school tours (exceptions include Chilufya et al., 2019; Frenzel & Blakeman, 2015). In what follows, one school that falls under the banner of ‘developmentourism’ is examined.

3. Research design

Matopo School is a primary school located near a regional centre in Matabeleland North, Zimbabwe. The school was initially chosen for its substantial connection to one tourism company (Shumba Safaris), however, over the course of the fieldwork it became evident there were a number of tour companies visiting the school. In 2019, the school received 126 visits in total. Human Research Ethics Committee Approval was obtained (University of Newcastle, Human Research Ethics Committee, Approval No. H-2018-0447) before research was conducted and all names of people, institutions and businesses are pseudonyms. All participants gave informed consent before participating in the research and chose their pseudonyms.

Matopo School is funded solely through tourism endeavours and partnerships. The two school founders, Alison and Thompson, own and operate a safari company (Shumba Safaris), which financially supports a charitable foundation developed for the school. Thompson is a Zimbabwean man and Alison is a woman who lives in the United Kingdom. Both have extensive tourism experience but no education or educational leadership experience. They opened the school after they saw children walking several kilometres to school each day and they wanted to ‘giveback’ to their local community. The charitable organisation is funded by private donors and previous guests of Shumba Safaris. Most of the school’s funds are received from the payment of school fees and supporting funds provided by Shumba Safaris’ charitable organisation. The school receives funding from visits by Education Tours and funds from a charitable trust associated with Adventure Company. The school tour in this paper highlights the difficulties associated with naming school tours in a niche, it fits mostly under the banner of ‘developmentourism’ although the tour is associated with a safari itinerary. It could also be considered cultural tourism, or philanthropic tourism. Developmentourism offers a broader banner under which this tourism fits.

The research was conducted during one school term in 2019. During the 13 week school term, the researcher lived in the area whilst

attending school three days a week, and a local non-government organisation office two days a week – during these activities she acted as a participant observer (Harper and Smithers, 2023; Kitchen & Tate, 2000). The researcher kept daily field notes whilst conducting the research, roughly following Sarah Delamont’s method as detailed by Walford (2009). The researcher is a white, Zimbabwean born Australian woman who had existing connections with schools in the area, but not with Matopo School. The researcher is a qualified school teacher in Australia. Reciprocal appropriation was at the heart of the research process, with the researcher observing the school whilst also undertaking any additional duties or tasks required. This meant acting in many roles, including teacher, observer, school secretary and researcher (see also Harper & Smithers, 2023).

The data used in this paper is drawn from semi-structured interviews with teachers, school leaders and tourism personnel that lasted between 40 min and 90 min (see supplementary material for interview schedule). All names are pseudonyms. Eight of the nine teachers/leaders employed at the school were interviewed and less than 5 tourism personnel were interviewed. In a category where there are less than five participants, the number of participants has not been identified. This was a requirement for institutional ethics approval to ensure anonymity, as the industry and the region were quite small and participants may be known to each other.

Information about the participants named in this paper is provided in Table 2. All effort has been made to ensure the participants cannot identify each other, so the table provides detail on the participants’ roles, and involvement in the school.

3.1. Data analysis

The purpose of this paper is to be an informative account, therefore, to extract data the researcher utilised NVIVO search functions to elucidate mentions of each company in the semi-structured interviews and the field notes. Following the extraction, the researcher arranged the quotes and excerpts from fieldnotes according to the tour company. Within each corpus of data relevant to each company, extracts were organised into three categories: descriptions of the tour or funding mechanisms, benefits, and challenges. These categories were used to examine the funding mechanism for each company and provide a descriptive analysis of the arrangements, including the benefits and challenges.

Table 2
Participant information.

Participant name	Role	Level of involvement in the school and tourism
Alison	School founder	Visits school a few times a year, organises school finances, reports to donors and school sponsorship program
Astrid	Classroom teacher	Responsible for the organisation of small items donated during the tours and for guiding tours
Ayanda	School leader	Manages and leads school, responsible for school history, administration of school sponsorship program and guiding tours
Greg Nolly	Tour Guide Classroom teacher	Visits school with Education Tours Responsible for school history talk and guiding tours
Tabitha	School leader	Responsible for school history talk and guiding tours
Thompson	School founder	Day-to-day management of school such as maintenance, oversight of building projects, school inspections of teachers, and responsible for some school tours for specific donors
Zibusiso	Classroom teacher/ School leader	Responsible for school history talk and guiding tours

4. Findings

The school tour begins when tourists arrive on a minibus. They usually arrive after the completion of another tourist activity, such as meeting elephants, scenic flights or viewing a nearby landmark. Most tour groups were scheduled to arrive around 10 am, however, they often arrive late. The tourists are greeted by students from the school when they step out of the bus and are guided by hand to an open area in which the entertainment takes place. Once all students and tourists are gathered, the ‘entertainment group’ lead singing and dancing which includes a mix of Western songs and local Ndebele songs. Then there is a ‘school history’ component which remains the same for each tour configuration. During the history, a teacher explains how the school was built and identifies which buildings and infrastructure were donated by certain groups, followed by an explicit call to action for tourists to donate to the charitable foundation associated with Shumba Safaris or to sponsor children. Tourists may ask questions about the school which usually include questions concerning enrolment numbers, the number of girls and the number of children who receive sponsorship. After the history, tourists engage in a tour of the school that includes all classrooms, the school kitchen and the garden. When they visit the Grade 5 classroom, it is transformed into a ‘school shop’ that sells necklaces, beads and chitenge aprons.¹ When the classroom is the shop, all Grade 5 students participate in the making of necklaces, bangles and chitenge aprons. The items for sale are displayed on student desks; students are unable to complete normal classroom tasks during the tour. At the end of the school tour, the tourists leave to undertake a village tour.

The school tours all create some level of disruption to the students in the school. The type and level of disruption is summarised in Table 3.

4.1. Adventure company

Adventure Company offers ‘off the beaten track’ style tours and caters to mostly American tourists who are over the age of 50 and physically active. Their offerings include over 80 countries and their website emphasises the tours as including access to local connections and value for money. Matopo School received 80 visits from this company in 2019.

The visits from Adventure Company had minimal disruption for the whole school but were disruptive for particular children and classes. In this tour configuration, a small group of students known as the ‘enter-

Table 3
Level of disruption per company.

	Length of disruption	Level of disruption	Number of visits in 2019
Adventure Company	2–3 h	Entertainment group during entertainment portion, student tour guides and one teacher absent from class during the school tour, Grade 5 during ‘school shop’ component	80
Education Tours	2–3 h + village tour	To the whole school during the entertainment portion, one teacher was absent from class for the duration of school and village tour, Grade 5 during the ‘school shop’ component	41
Shumba Safaris	Whole school day	Whole school with tourists involved in classrooms and lessons	5

¹ Chitenge is a type of colourful cloth used in Zimbabwe to make clothes and other items.

tainment group’ conduct the singing and dancing, whilst the school remains in their classrooms. Some students are designated tour guides, who remain for the duration of the school history (roughly 30 min) and then ‘guide’ the tourists around the school with a teacher supervising. The tour group then return to their vehicle and visit a village in the area, with their Adventure Company tour guide.

Adventure Company’s relationship with the school was contested. During the fieldwork, the researcher witnessed several conversations in which there was consideration of ending the relationship between Adventure Company and Matopo School. The main source of concern was that Adventure Company had not provided a promised donation of one classroom block. Alison, a school founder, identified:

Because the one thing that they have done is paid for a sign. Which you’ve probably seen. Which is sitting in one of the classrooms, saying that they support Matopo School and as far as I am concerned they haven’t supported Matopo School at all... My understanding is that from the last meeting they have said they are going to re-look at what the school visits entail and also try and reduce the number of visits. And, they have also been told that they need to do something pretty quick sharp in terms of supporting the school. But I think they are talking about doing funding for our final classroom block for the primary school, but time will tell. But I am not happy with them at the moment. At all.

One reason for the lack of donation was due to Adventure Company providing all philanthropic donations through a charitable organisation. The charitable organisation was based in America but used a local charitable organisation to facilitate the spending of funds. The structure meant that there were several layers of bureaucracy and approvals required before funds could be spent, increasing the time from initial planning to initiation of funding projects.

Adventure Company’s donations were limited to the contributions by the charitable organisation. The teachers in the school also felt Adventure Company stopped ad-hoc donations during the tour:

Because with Adventure Company, as I understand it the guests are not supposed to donate to the school. They’re supposed to give to the offices then the offices have to take the items to the schools. But some of them the problem now comes when they ask, “what has Adventure Company done for the school?” Then we have to say the truth and then if we say nothing, we don’t know how they take it but some they say, “ah, if you go through that one I am not donating because things don’t end up getting to where they’re supposed to go to” (Zibusiso).

This policy was a result of the charitable organisation which aimed to ensure equitable distribution of donations to all schools under its purview – they would prefer to receive donations to their office and distribute where it might be needed, rather than tourists providing on-the-ground donations in an ad-hoc fashion. The lack of donations during the tour was significant for the school, as this was one way they received small goods such as sporting items, stationery and resources.

The structure of the Adventure Company tour means that certain children are removed from their classroom for the duration of the tour. One teacher also supervises the tour group and student tour guides, leaving their class unattended. In the design of this tour there are a few considerations to be made. First, student tour guides can lengthen the time the tour takes as they may not be cognisant of the disruption to schooling. Ayanda, a school leader, identifies this:

The other groups like Adventure Company usually they prefer the kids to move around with them. But we have seen that usually it’s time consuming when it’s done by the kids because you have to try to control them because that one starts this side, the other one goes to the kitchen. The other one, for you now to say, “have we finished? Should we come back together now?” Now it would take some time, but maybe it has been working because we will encourage the kids

“can you walk fast with them? Can you show them all the places so that they don't miss anything before they go back to their bus?”

As a teacher in a classroom, the author experienced the disruptive nature of this tour firsthand. The unstructured nature of individual student guides meant that tourists were not one large group moving through the school, rather, they would enter classrooms in small groups. In Zimbabwe, the protocol for a visitor to a classroom is rigid, with formal greetings enacted for all visitors. Therefore, if visitors to the classroom arrive in small groups, the classes were disrupted multiple times due to the formal greeting. The tour configuration creates a continued disruption for teachers in their daily work of conducting lessons.

The second problem with the structure of Adventure Company's tour was that some students missed classroom instructions and lessons, due to being part of the tour guide group. Astrid, a classroom teacher, identifies this:

You find most of the times they are the same kids that do that routine, each and every time and they end up losing a lot. Because we cannot wait for them to finish with the visitors and then proceed, we just carry on whatever is happening in the classroom and when they come later, sometimes you tend to forget that they didn't get the concept what you taught the other kids who were left in the classroom. So that becomes a challenge.

The structure of the tour, in which only some children were removed from their classroom, meant that some children missed important learning time. As outlined above, the teachers felt the ‘payoff’ from the structure of the Adventure Company tour was not enough to justify the time required by students or the loss of curriculum time. The students missing certain segments of planned lessons made it more difficult for teachers to provide them with catchup materials, as the school tours were frequent.

4.2. Education tours

Education Tours itineraries are aimed at Americans over the age of 50. These tours are educational in nature, with a focus on the combination of learning and tourism. Tour participants are provided with reading lists before departure and the point of difference for the company is their local expertise. Greg, a tour guide for Education Tours explains,

The program that we run with Education Tours in that context is educational... the focus that Education Tours has is education. So, it is adult learning...I have got to give a series of a lectures throughout the journey, and it could be on lions, termites, Zimbabwe. It could be anything: elephants, social life of the elephants, conflict with elephants, that sort of thing. So, the whole focus is on education. And one of the things is that they try and do is give back to the community.

Matopo School received 41 visits from Education Tours in 2019. They were the first company to begin tours at the school, beginning in 2015.

The structure of the Education Tours visit was disruptive to the whole school. In this tour configuration, the whole school greet the tour group and participates in the singing and dancing. All students return to their classrooms at the end of this component. One teacher is responsible for the conduct of the school tour, and their class remains unsupervised during the time they guide the tourists around the school. Following the school tour, the teacher is then responsible for accompanying the tour group on their village tour. This tour adds additional time to the overall tour and disturbance to the school.

Education Tours provides \$200US cash donations to the school for each visit. The school uses this money for larger purchases that require US dollars or for emergencies. The tours had also resulted in large

donations from certain groups, as detailed by Alison, the school founder:

We had one of the school buildings that has come from Education Tours, but that was a specific trip. Which, on that trip one of the guests said, “let's all pledge money to build a school building.” And she got them all to commit to making donations, quite hefty donations, to fund the school building. And she gave I think about \$8000 and everyone else had pledged money. And they had all actually pledged two-year donations, and she was only that one person who had really pushed it. She gave her two years. And nobody else came back and gave their second-year donation. And it was really interesting, how some people just like to talk about it. And then, secretly not really do what they promised.

In her interview Alison later identified the main purpose of the Education Tours and Adventure Company visits was to gain sponsors for the children in the school, rather than as a source for financial donations. The sponsorship of students was funded through the charitable organisation associated with Alison and Thompson, the school founders. Sponsorship of children covered the cost of their school fees and uniforms, enabling the school to feed all children two hot meals a day and to ensure teachers' salaries could be paid.

For the teachers, the \$200US donation was an important component of the Education Tours visit. Nolly outlines the importance:

Particularly with the Education Tours, who come here and leave the money, it is a benefit to the school, because that money is being used by the school to develop the school and to help maybe some other less privileged children. So even the stationery, some of these friends who come here and leave the stationery we have got some other children, who have the parent who can't even buy them books or pencils, so it is a benefit.

In Zimbabwe, at the time of the research, there was a dual currency system in which US\$ could be exchanged for Zimbabwean bond dollars, at a rate of roughly 1:4 (Imam, 2022). The value of US\$ also meant the teachers could purchase goods in nearby countries such as Zambia and Botswana to purchase products such as a new freezer or generator. Since the fieldwork in 2019, the value of the US\$ on the parallel market has only increased making the addition of US\$ to the school extremely valuable (see Imam, 2022).

The Education Tours visit was disruptive to the school for several reasons. The first being that the whole school were required to greet the tourists and participate in singing and dancing for them. An extract from the researcher's fieldnotes identifies the disruption to learning:

It is an Education Tour and the class leaves the classroom to watch the singing and dancing. After this Zibusiso is on duty, so Zibusiso stays to do the school history speech and the tour, and I take the children back to class to begin the heritage studies test, it is 11:14 am by the time we are settled, so almost 30 mins taken by the routine.

Although the singing and dancing represented a small component of the school tour itself, it was very disruptive for the whole school as it required a disruption of the usual classroom routine. Given that most tour groups were not on time, it was hard for teachers to plan for this significant disruption and often found themselves halfway through teaching a concept when the tourist group arrived. As discussed elsewhere, the teachers unanimously believed the solution to this problem was to change the time of the tours to the afternoon (see Smithers & Ailwood, 2022b).

The next consequence of the design of the Education Tours visit was that one teacher was required to be present on the tour from start to finish, including the village visit. At times, the teachers would be absent from their classroom for 2–3 h at a time. The teachers had designed a ‘buddy’ system in which they would supervise another teacher's class if they had to guide a tour:

We as school we have set up ourselves to pair up, to say, people maybe in the same Grade, say like ECDs A and B, you cannot have them in the same group, one will have to remain with the kids. So, when you go out make sure maybe your neighbour has to look after your kids when you go out to the village. Like in our case, I cannot go out to the village with [the headmaster] because one of us has to remain at school. So we are split, we have other people who will help us. (Tabitha).

Although the teachers had devised a system for the disruptions, it still represented a loss of learning time. The classwork the children were given during this time was usually 'busy work' and did not represent new topics or concepts. At times, it was particularly problematic if the buddy teacher was unable to provide an appropriate level of supervision. For example, there was an incident during the fieldwork in which two children had an argument which culminated in a physical fight – a fight that may have been prevented if the teacher had been in the classroom. If the purpose of tourism in the school is to improve the educational outcomes of children, then it is also important for the teacher to be present in the classroom (Smithers & Ailwood, 2022b). Whilst the Adventure Company tour also included the teacher being absent from the classroom, the Education Tours visit required a much longer absence and for the teacher to leave the school grounds.

4.3. Shumba Safaris

Shumba Safaris is a high-end tour company, owned and operated by the two school founders, Alison and Thompson. Shumba Safaris provides operating costs for the school and funds Alison's salary to run both the school and the tour company. Thompson usually acts as the tour guide for any tours conducted by Shumba Safaris, with Alison responsible for booking and day-to-day management. In 2019, Shumba Safaris visited Matopo School five times.

For a Shumba Safaris visit, the whole school was expected to greet and entertain the tourists, even if the tour fell on a weekend. The entire school are involved in the entertainment portion and return to their classrooms. Following the school history talk, the tourists visit every classroom. During this classroom visit, the tourists spend a sustained amount of time with the students and this may include teaching a lesson or playing with children. A Shumba Safaris tour is expected to disrupt most of the school day. An extract from the researcher's field notes highlights this:

It was announced in the teacher's meeting that there was a new tour date added to the schedule. It was a Shumba Safaris tour with Thompson, and the visitors are already donors to the school. They sponsored 5 children and also paid for the borehole to be constructed. They will be at the school the whole day and wish to see how it runs. So all students and staff must attend, even though it is a weekend.

The design of the Shumba Safaris tour, although less frequent, represents a disruption to the students and teachers beyond the school day. They are asked to attend school on days that are not school days and must give up personal time to greet and guide the tourists.

Shumba Safaris provides the largest contribution to the school. The contributions are twofold, with ongoing operating costs provided in the form of teacher salaries and the facilitation of sponsorships for children. The other contributions are \$200US per visit provided by tourists and the contributions provided by tourists who support Shumba Safaris. The guests of Shumba Safaris had not always visited the school itself but were aware of the school due to being a client of the company. Alison details this:

And things like, when we had the water crisis last year, we needed to do a borehole and that was literally one client who said, "how much do you need?" And I said, "we haven't got a quote yet, we are

thinking it will be about \$15,000" and she just said, "Oh, I'll send 20." (Alison).

This tourist then later organised a visit to the school. Before this, their engagement with the school had been through Shumba Safaris and the information provided by Shumba Safaris to their guests. In cases such as this, the type of tourism could be more closely considered philanthropic tourism, in which existing supporters visit a site.

Alison, the school founder, reflects on the contributions made by Shumba Safari guests in relation to the other companies:

So, we are very very lucky that we have had some big, lump sums. Mainly the tourists who come out on Adventure Company or Education Tours, they are probably more likely to be interested in sponsorship. And again, that's still not high numbers at all. You'll get one or two that come home very enthused and then tell all their friends and insist that relatives must sponsor, but mostly you don't get anything. Which is why I've got a real concern about how disruptive the [Education Tours and Adventure Company] tours are. When we are actually getting very little out of it. (Alison).

Shumba Safaris is quite high end so we are lucky enough to have quite a few regular guests who we have built up very good relationships with over the years, who have also been supportive, with some substantial donations (Alison).

Shumba Safaris represented 71% of the funding for the school, at the time of the interview with Alison. According to Alison, these donations were the result of existing relationships rather than the tours conducted at the school.

Shumba Safaris tours occur much less than the other companies, however, they are the most disruptive to the school when they occur. As Shumba Safaris is the main contributor to schools' funds it represents a significant risk if the tours are not able to continue. Whilst the actual tours were disruptive, many people donated *without* visiting the school:

The people who've really have given most support, they more look at the school from a less of personal, individual child. I don't think they need a child to lead them around or - they look at the bigger picture - So no, I don't think [the school tour] benefits us in anyway. Or a very very minor way with the tourists being led around by the kids. (Alison).

As the largest contributions at the time of the interview were sourced from donors who had not *yet* visited the school it could also be argued that the Shumba Safaris tour offers more money for significantly less disruption/loss of curriculum time. Given Shumba Safaris provides the largest contribution to Matopo School, it is surprising that these tourists have not yet visited the school – raising the question as to whether there is a need for school tours at all.

Unlike the other variants of the school tour, the donations made to the school through the charitable foundation do not go through an intermediary, rather Alison and Thompson are solely responsible for the funds and spending the funds. Thompson identifies the benefit of this:

100% of our contributions received are used directly towards the project. The company, Shumba Safaris, will subsidise any that needs extra. So we get a little extra from our business, and we plough that to help the charity as well. (Thompson).

The arrangement gives the school flexibility in how, and when, they spend their funds. Rather than relying on another organisation to process the funds and decide how they are spent, Alison and Thompson have complete control over how the funds are spent.

The funding from Shumba Safaris is contingent on two elements: the success of Shumba Safaris as a tourism company and the continued donations to the Charitable trust. Thompson, the school founder, was aware that the funding had the potential to run out:

I hope it is not going to get commercial, I would hate the day when people say, well it is very commercialised. And it is going to happen, when the kids speak fluent English and they are not struggling to say anything. People will say, “well it looks like the school is well off”. That is one of the risks that we actually, yeah are going to run into. At some point, I think people will say, “well you got everything, you don't need help”. But that is one of the disadvantages of success. Something will give in some day.

The idea that the funding might end raises questions about how sustainable this form of funding is for the school, given the funding may be contingent on the school appearing to be at a particular point of ‘development’. This is particularly important for the tours run through Shumba Safaris, as the other companies provide funds and resources, but not to the same extent.

5. Discussion

Most of the tourists who visited Matopo School were part of a previously arranged safari itinerary that included the school tour as a smaller component of a mass tourism itinerary. In some ways, this could be considered a cultural tourism component which incorporates some corporate social responsibility through the donation of a classroom building (in the case of Adventure Company), or a development tourism venture that enables tourists to provide small gifts and a cash donation to the school (in the case of Education Tours). Some of the Shumba Safaris tourists were acting as philanthropic tourists (see [Koot & Fletcher, 2021](#); [Lacey et al., 2012](#)) who were visiting a site they had previously supported. Interestingly, most large infrastructure donations were from people who had not yet visited the school. This is an interesting addition to the tourism field as it suggests there are configurations outside those recorded in philanthropic tourism ventures, in which tourists usually visit a site they have previously connected with. In naming this type of tourism more broadly as school tours as a micro-niche that sits within development tourism, the multiplicity of this tourism can be explored.

There are a multitude of configurations for funding Matopo School. [Mostafanezhad \(2013\)](#) identified, “NGOs are now key players in alternative tourism development generally” (p. 152). Matopo School is an example of this, in which at least two non-government organisations were tied to the funding and implementation of resources. On one hand, the funding arrangement provides a level of future-proofing to Matopo School, by sourcing a diverse range of funding streams they can potentially safeguard the school, ensuring they can continue if one company withdraws support. However, by sourcing multiple funding arrangements the school is required to navigate multiple relationships with external stakeholders and non-government organisations related to these stakeholders. The funding is contingent on the maintenance of these relationships and on meeting the wishes of external donors. This is a tension more broadly for projects funded through development (c.f. [Moyo, 2009](#)), in which participants must continuously apply for, and source, funding that will always be contingent on meeting external donors' aims and wishes.

A lack of agency on the part of host communities in development projects has previously been reported in the research literature and is a concerning component of tourism involving development ([Burns & Barrie, 2005](#); [Harrison, 2015](#)). Reflective of broader industry trends, the school founders and school staff had very little control over how the Adventure Company tour could run. The Education Tours tour configuration was also largely out of the control of the teachers; however, the school founders had some control over the tour configuration. The Shumba Safaris tour enabled the school founders to have the most control over the tour as they were directly responsible for the tour itself. The relative lack of autonomy over the structure of the tour echoes the broader politics of development in which “participation in a commodified development agenda ultimately perpetuates neoliberal modes of

conduct and encounter with the Global South” ([Mostafanezhad, 2013](#) p. 164).

Although the tour offers opportunities for students to practice English, there was little observed benefit for the children (see [Smithers, 2023a](#)). The teachers found the tour highly disruptive to classroom routines and the teachers wished for the tour to change to the afternoon, but they had very little say over timing (see [Smithers & Ailwood, 2022b](#)). The timing of the tour is important as there are mandated minimum curriculum hours for all schools in Zimbabwe, and the tours potentially compromise the delivery of these mandated curriculum hours. Although children were involved in crafting, which might be considered a useful skill, the mandated hours did not include craft as a curriculum area. Higher levels of autonomy and choice in the conduct of the school tour would not only provide the school with more power in the implementation of the tourism but could enable the school to focus on maximising classroom time for students, as they could configure the tour according to the needs and wants of the school.

In considering the school tour configurations in a broader context, it is important to identify how these sit within the broader geopolitics of compassions of care and development as a discourse ([Mostafanezhad, 2013, 2014](#)). [Mowforth and Munt \(2009\)](#) identify that “development may be best understood foremost as a hegemonic discourse that originates from, and is largely fashioned by, First World dominated global institutions, governments, agencies and academe.” (pp. 31–32). In considering development as a discourse, that is used and taken up in measuring countries on a scale of progression, it is important to note these school tours are potentially an instrument of development discourse at work. In prioritising the voice and structure of the white, western non-government organisations and tourism companies who work with Matopo School, there is a continuation of a de-privileging of voices from the Global South. The rhetoric of any aid being useful aid is harmful and part of these broader discourses of development and the white saviour ([Mostafanezhad, 2013](#); [Mowforth & Munt, 2009](#)).

6. Conclusion

[Mutana et al. \(2013\)](#) identified that up to 95% of tourism providers in Matabeleland North provide some form of charitable funding or donation to schools. Yet, there is a paucity of research on these types of activities with little known about the scope or competitiveness of this type of funding. This paper has provided insight into the configuration of school tours in one school in Matabeleland North, Zimbabwe. This paper represents a significant contribution to the area of school tours as it provides insights into the multiple ways to conduct a school tour. It offers these tour configurations as examples, a way for practitioners to consider the benefits of each configuration.

Future research could include investigations of the extent and nature of school tours worldwide as there are currently very few systematic examinations of the extent to which this type of philanthropic partnership occurs. Given how little is currently known about school tours, there is much scope to investigate the different configurations and funding models that exist. Further work could investigate if school tours are disruptive to student learning and the extent to which they support the development of schools in the Global South.

There is not one single story of types of tourism that involves schools – this is evident in the number of tourisms covered in the opening section of this paper. In the case of Matopo School, these tours provide valuable infrastructure and support but represent a disruption to valuable and mandated curriculum time. Other research has found that school tours in other countries also provide valuable resourcing and infrastructure ([Chilufya et al., 2019](#); [Frenzel & Blakeman, 2015](#)). Just as there is not one single story of these types of tourism, it seems that there may not be any easy or clear answer on how these tours should continue. Development through tourism is not the only answer for communities but it is currently one mechanism that supports and develops communities. As [Scheyvens \(2024\)](#) identifies, “ultimately it is vital to find ways in which

tourism can work *for* development... tourism is not *the* answer to development problems facing diverse communities around the world” (p. 2).

The three different funding models at Matopo School provide some ways that tourism is working *for* development – through resourcing and funding of the school. However, in each configuration, there were some levels of disruption to the school day. There are unavoidable day-to-day effects of the school tour on the running of a school, such as students and teachers being absent from class – resulting in a loss of curriculum time as mandated by the Zimbabwean Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education. In assessing the good and bad of this type of tourism, it seems that if this tourism is to exist, the ideal form of the school tour should ensure that students and teachers remain in their classrooms. In other places, tours exist where tourists do not enter classrooms nor disrupt learning time for students (c.f. Frenzel & Blakeman, 2015). Studies have previously highlighted the risks of volunteer tourists in schools (e.g. Bargeman et al., 2018; Henry, 2020); indeed, interactions between tourists and students raise child protection concerns, and there should be consideration for how funds can be raised without interactions with children.

School tours are a tourism product with a blending of development and tourism, in which the teachers, school founders and children must become sellers of a ‘product’ (Baptista, 2011). The voyeuristic nature of these tours I have discussed elsewhere (see Smithers, 2023a, 2023b); however, the new forms of tourism that encourage commodification of development risk perpetuating and recreating harmful colonial stereotypes. One such risk is the implementation of policies and structures that prioritise Global North ways of knowing and doing. Scheyvens (2024) implores us to ask, “is tourism the right industry to pursue in this place at this time? If so, how should it be pursued?” (p. 7). In the case of Matopo School, it seems that the answer is yes, tourism is the right industry to pursue funding and development of infrastructure, however, greater emphasis should be on co-design with tours that are place-based, and with policies that are situated and made with the local community, rather than for them.

CRedit statement

As the sole author, Kathleen Smithers was responsible for all components of the research project.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Kathleen Smithers: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Project administration, Methodology, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

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