

The impact of tourism on cultural diplomacy: building bridges between Angola, Zambia, Namibia, Zimbabwe and Botswana in the Southern African context

The Impact of Tourism on Cultural Diplomacy: Building Bridges between Angola, Zambia, Namibia, Zimbabwe, and Botswana in the Southern African Context

Claudio Emilio Culessala¹

Kelsom Chavonga²

Abstract

This article analyzes the impact of tourism as an instrument of cultural diplomacy between Angola, Zambia, Namibia, Zimbabwe, and Botswana, within the context of Southern African regional integration. It is based on the premise that cross-border tourism can strengthen cultural ties, revive shared memories, and promote common values among peoples historically linked but fragmented by colonial borders. The research uses a mixed approach, predominantly quantitative, based on theoretical review and empirical analysis, based on surveys of local stakeholders. The results demonstrate that cultural tourism goes beyond its economic role, acting as a symbolic vector for reconnection, identity expression, and regional cooperation. Initiatives such as cultural festivals, integrated tourism routes, and cross-border heritage sites are highlighted, contributing to closer community-based diplomacy, strengthening cohesion and mutual understanding. It was concluded that, in addition to economic benefits, tourism has strategic potential to consolidate a sustainable African cultural diplomacy focused on local cultural dynamics.

Keywords: Tourism; Cultural Diplomacy; Regional Integration; Southern Africa; Cross-Border Cooperation.

Abstract

This article analyzes the impact of tourism as an instrument of cultural diplomacy among Angola, Zambia, Namibia, Zimbabwe, and Botswana, within the context of regional integration in Southern Africa. It is based on the premise that cross-border tourism can strengthen cultural ties, recover shared memories, and promote common values among historically connected peoples fragmented by colonial borders. The research adopts a mixed-methods approach, with a quantitative predominance, grounded in theoretical review and empirical analysis based on surveys administered to local actors. The findings demonstrate that cultural tourism goes beyond its economic role, serving as a symbolic vector of reconnection, identity expression, and regional cooperation. Initiatives such as cultural festivals, integrated tourist routes, and cross-border heritage projects emerge as key mechanisms for a diplomacy that is closer to communities, fostering cohesion and mutual understanding. It is concluded that, beyond economic benefits, tourism holds

¹ Graduated in Tourism Management from the University of Cuito Cuanavale, Angola. Professor and Head of the Teaching and Research Section of the Bachelor's Degree in Hotel and Tourism Management at the Nimi Ya Lukeny University Institute – Soyo. Researcher, Orcid: 0009-0000-5429-8736, Email: emiliocu45@gmail.com

² Master's degree in Human Resource Management from Lusíada University of Angola – Benguela campus, bachelor's degree in History, with a focus on African studies, postgraduate degree in international foundations of the process of initial training in higher education, from the Maravilha Polytechnic Institute in partnership with the University of Varona, Cuba. University professor and coordinator of the undergraduate program in History at the Maravilha Polytechnic Institute of Benguela. Researcher, Orcid: 0009-0009-7778-1689, Email: dekhelsonmixpro@gmial.com

strategic potential to consolidate a sustainable African cultural diplomacy centered on local cultural dynamics.

Keywords: Tourism; Cultural Diplomacy; Regional Integration; Southern Africa; Cross-border cooperation.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism, as a global, dynamic and multidimensional phenomenon, has consolidated itself as a strategic instrument for bringing cultures closer together, promoting dialogue intercultural, mutual understanding, and building bridges between peoples and nations. In the Southern African region, countries such as Angola, Zambia, Namibia, Zimbabwe, and Botswana share not only geographical borders, but also historical, ethnic, cultural and linguistic that were artificially fragmented by colonial powers European, particularly since the Berlin Conference (1884-1885). Today, these links can be strategically rehabilitated through cultural diplomacy anchored in sustainable and inclusive tourism. According to Nye (2004), the concept of cultural diplomacy is part of the logic of *soft power*, understood as the use of resources non-coercive, such as culture, values and narratives, to positively influence other international actors. In this context, tourism is a channel legitimate to exercise this form of power, allowing African countries strengthen bilateral and multilateral relations by valuing their heritage shared cultural values. Uvin (2002) emphasizes that culture constitutes a neutral and peacebuilding and reconciliation insurance, especially in historically affected by ethnic and political tensions.

Southern Africa is home to transboundary natural and cultural heritage sites of great relevance, as is the case of the Kavango-Zambezi transfrontier conservation area (KAZA), which covers territories of Angola, Zambia, Namibia, Botswana and Zimbabwe. These spaces are not only economic assets, but also symbols of cooperation regional and community integration. In addition, the region is marked by the presence of ethnic groups with transnational identities, such as the Ovambo, who inhabit both southern Angola as well as northern Namibia, as well as the Bemba and Lozi, who distributed between Zambia and neighboring countries. The persistence of these communities beyond borders is evidence of the artificiality of colonial delimitations imposed on Berlin is a testament to pre-colonial African civilizational unity.

In this sense, tourism can function as a mechanism for people to reunite, rebuilding identity ties and strengthening regional solidarity. As noted Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013), African unity should not be just a political project, but also a social and cultural reality rooted in the daily practices of people. Community-based tourism and regional cultural festivals represent practices concrete ways of reconnecting once-separated populations, fostering a *rooted cosmopolitanism*, in the words of Mbembe (2001), that is, an openness to another from an affirmed African identity.

Additionally, countries such as Zambia, Namibia and Angola are home to ethnic minorities who play a fundamental role in the social fabric, such as the San (or Khoisan), often marginalized, but holders of ancestral knowledge with great tourism and ecological potential. Promoting inclusive tourism policies can contribute to the appreciation of these communities, while strengthening the national cohesion and recognition of African cultural diversity.

However, despite its clear potential, Southern Africa faces challenges significant structural elements for the consolidation of effective cultural diplomacy through of tourism. The weak infrastructural integration between countries, the persistence of barriers bureaucratic borders and the absence of coordinated regional policies for the promotion tourism constitute significant obstacles. The fragmented approach to resources common tourist issues compromise diplomatic cooperation efforts and weaken the transformative potential of tourism. As Nkrumah (1963) argues, African unity requires not only political will, but also the strategic harmonization of policies economic and cultural. In this scenario, it becomes imperative to understand tourism not only as an economic activity, but as a diplomatic practice and cultural that requires an integrated and multisectoral approach. The Southern African Development Community (SADC) presents itself as a platform privileged for the articulation of joint initiatives, capable of transforming tourism an engine of sustainable development, regional integration and identity affirmation.

This article therefore aims to investigate the impact of tourism on bridge construction. diplomatic and cultural relations between Angola, Zambia, Namibia, Zimbabwe and Botswana, with special emphasis on how tourism exchanges promote diplomacy of proximity and strengthen regional relations. The analysis will be based on research

fieldwork, prioritizing the empirical approach and the perceptions of the main actors involved, including government institutions, tour operators, leaders community and civil society organizations.

The choice of this theme is justified by the growing centrality of regional integration strategies in Southern Africa, especially in a post-pandemic context in which tourism reappears as a strategic sector for economic recovery, strengthening cohesion sociocultural and the reconfiguration of relations between historically interconnected peoples. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed structural weaknesses in African economies, but also opened up opportunities to rethink regional cooperation mechanisms based on in endogenous resources, such as shared cultural heritage and natural landscapes cross-border (AU, 2020; SADC, 2022).

In this context, tourism emerges not only as an economic engine, but as instrument of cultural diplomacy, allowing the valorization of African identities and the construction of positive narratives about the continent. As Mbembe (2001) states, the “rooted cosmopolitanism” of African culture can be strategically mobilized to foster bonds of solidarity and mutual understanding between peoples who were artificially separated by colonial borders. The Berlin Conference (1884-1885) imposed territorial delimitations that fragmented ethnic communities, such as the Ovambo, for example, present in Angola and Namibia, or the Lozi, who inhabit regions of Zambia and Zimbabwe. Today, tourism offers a unique opportunity for reunion cultural and symbolic reconstruction of these historical connections. Furthermore, authors as Nkrumah (1963) and Amin (2006) argued, in their pan-Africanist proposals, that continental integration must be based on shared cultural foundations, to beyond the economic and political dimensions. In this sense, cultural diplomacy, understood as the intentional use of cultural practices to promote understanding and cooperation between nations (Nye, 2004), gains a concrete and operational dimension through of sustainable and inclusive tourism. In the SADC region, where initiatives such as the Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area (KAZA TFCA) exist, the potential of tourism to foster networks of dialogue, exchange and development shared. However, there remains a gap in Lusophone academic production that explores, critically and empirically, the role of tourism as a vector of cultural diplomacy in African context. Most studies still prioritize economic-

functionalists, neglecting the symbolic, political and identity dimension of tourism in regions marked by colonial legacies and multi-ethnic realities.

Thus, this research aims to fill this gap, bringing a authentic and interdisciplinary contribution anchored in the concrete reality of Angola, Zambia, Namibia, Zimbabwe, and Botswana. By valuing the perceptions of local stakeholders, communities, tour operators, cultural institutions, and policymakers. The study seeks to identify not only the potential of tourism as a tool for integration, but also its limits as a practice of cultural diplomacy in Africa contemporary Austral. The approach adopted thus aims to reinforce a perspective Afrocentric and contextualized on the dynamics of cultural reconnection, regional cohesion and building lasting bridges between the peoples of the southern continent.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review addresses the fundamental concepts of tourism and diplomacy cultural, as well as themes related to the object of study. The relationships between tourism and cultural diplomacy in the context of local and regional development, the role economic, social and political aspects of tourism, and the challenges and potential of tourism cross-border. Regional initiatives such as the KAZA TFCA and the SADC instruments, the impacts of colonial borders, the cultural dimension of international relations in Southern Africa, the contribution of the third sector to cultural diplomacy and, finally, the prospects for developing this practice in the region.

Concept of Tourism

The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2021) defines tourism as a phenomenon social, cultural and economic that involves the movement of people out of their usual environment, for limited periods and for different purposes, such as leisure, business, health, education or pilgrimage. This sector is one of the main engines of the global economy, being responsible for driving job creation, the movement of foreign currency and the development of infrastructure in various regions of the world (UNWTO, 2021). Furthermore, it contributes significantly to cultural exchange, promoting the appreciation and preservation of the historical and natural heritage of locations visited. In the context of sustainable development, tourism activity has been increasingly oriented towards practices that minimize environmental impacts,

promote social inclusion and ensure lasting economic benefits to host communities (UNWTO, 2020).

At the same time, the excerpt presented offers a comprehensive and relevant view of the role of tourism in contemporary society, highlighting it as a phenomenon multifaceted with social, cultural, economic and environmental implications. The definition provided by the World Tourism Organization highlights the diversity of motivations that lead people to move, as well as the multiple benefits that the activity tourist can bring.

Tourism as a Cultural Diplomacy Strategy: Local Development and Regional

Local development can be defined as a process of transformation economic and social that relies on the potential of a region, promoting improving the quality of life of populations (Carvalho, 2012). In this sense, tourism emerges as a tool for inclusion, economic dynamism and cultural appreciation. For Milani (2005), local development requires intergenerational responsibility, highlighting the importance of environmental sustainability. Regional development, for in turn, seeks to reduce inequalities between different areas of the territory, mobilizing local resources and skills. As Pinho (2010) stated, this is the ability to a region to achieve autonomous and sustainable growth. Diniz (1993) adds that regional development is not limited to income expansion, but involves cohesion social and institutional strengthening. Tourism, as a diplomatic strategy cultural, drives this process by stimulating the economy, generating employment and strengthening social ties. The articulation of tourism with structured public policies allows for a equitable growth that respects local particularities, positioning the communities as protagonists of their own development (Novais, 2020).

It is understood that tourism, as a strategy of cultural diplomacy, presents itself as a powerful tool to drive local and regional development by promote the appreciation of a region's cultural identity and heritage. By attracting visitors, tourism stimulates the economy, generates employment, income and strengthens ties social through the inclusion of local communities in production chains.

In other words, tourism is no longer just an economic activity but has become a strategic vector of sustainable development, both on a local and regional scale. As the cited authors point out, development should not be limited to economic growth, but must also include improving the quality of life, social cohesion and environmental preservation. Therefore, by linking tourism with policies well-structured public institutions, it is possible to promote fairer growth that respects the particularities of each territory and intelligently value its resources cultural and natural. Cultural diplomacy, anchored in tourism, reinforces this path by position local populations as protagonists of their own development, by at the same time that it connects them with the world.

Tourism as an Economic, Social and Political Phenomenon

Tourism, in addition to its economic dimension, plays a relevant social and political role. Beni (2007) states that “tourism is an activity that boosts the economy, drives investment and promotes income redistribution, especially in regions less industrialized”. Cruz (2001) adds that “tourism is a social phenomenon that transforms the reality of host communities and requires participatory planning and inclusive policies”.

Public tourism policies must integrate economic, cultural and environmental issues to ensure sustainable benefits. In this sense, tourism must be understood as part of a complex system involving multiple interests and profoundly impacts society and local and regional geopolitics.

Furthermore, tourism is a strategic activity that directly impacts the economy, a country's society and politics. It generates jobs and moves various sectors productive and promotes cultural exchange. According to Beni (2007), tourism boosts regional economic development, while Cruz (2001) states that it transforms socially the host communities. Therefore, it must be treated as public policy integrated and not just activity as leisure.

Cross-border Tourism: Potentials and Limits

Cross-border tourism, characterized by the movement of visitors between regions of border, has high potential for regional integration. Timothy (2001) highlights that “borders can either facilitate or hinder tourism, depending on the degree of cooperation between countries”. The effectiveness of this modality requires policies coordinated, mutual trust between states and investments in infrastructure. In addition Furthermore, cooperation between governments and legal harmonization are essential for borders become zones of connection rather than exclusion. Cross-border tourism can, therefore, be a vector of cultural and economic diplomacy, promoting exchange symbolic and strengthening ties between nations.

Consequently, cross-border tourism plays a relevant role in integration between neighboring countries, as it stimulates the local economy and strengthens ties cultural. However, its development depends on cooperation between governments, reducing bureaucracy and improving infrastructure in border areas. In the absence of these factors, borders become barriers rather than points of connection. Therefore, the success of this type of tourism requires political dialogue, joint investments and well-articulated strategies between the territories involved.

Regional Initiatives in Southern Africa: KAZA, TFCA and SADC

According to Anderson et al. (2020), the Kavango Transfrontier Conservation Area Zambezi (KAZA TFCA) represents one of Africa's largest environmental initiatives Austral. Involving five countries, this initiative seeks to align conservation biodiversity with sustainable tourism, directly benefiting communities local.

SADC, in turn, supports initiatives such as KAZA because it recognizes that cooperation environmental and cultural can strengthen regional stability and generate revenue based on ecotourism (Töttemeyer & Shapi, 2021). The integrated policies promoted by SADC are concrete examples of how cultural and environmental diplomacy can be articulated. In this sense, these initiatives demonstrate how regional cooperation in Southern Africa can align environmental conservation, political integration and sustainable development, serving as a model for other regions in search of shared and resilient solutions.

Cultural Diplomacy

Cultural diplomacy is defined as the set of practices through which States promote their cultural identity on the international stage and interact with cultures foreign countries, with the aim of creating mutual understanding and strengthening relations diplomatic (Novais, 2020). Schneider (2006) highlights that cultural diplomacy is difficult to define, but its presence is easily recognized when observing the exchange of ideas, values, and artistic expressions among peoples. Initially centered on states, this diplomacy came to include NGOs, universities, and community networks (Španjevič, 2014).

In Southern Africa, this practice is closely related to the reconstruction process post-colonial identity and cultural integration promoted by bodies such as SADC.

Colonial Frontiers and the Challenges of Reconnection

The current configuration of African borders arises from the Partition of Berlin (1884 – 1885), when European powers divided the continent without regard to the ties existing cultural boundaries. Mazrui (1986) described these boundaries as “scars of colonization”, emphasizing that they fragmented civilizational bonds and imposed artificial political identities. Mbembe (2001) emphasizes that these borders not only separated peoples physically, but imposed colonized subjectivities, shaping the African perspective from a European perspective. Cultural diplomacy, in this context, is a instrument of symbolic healing and reconnection between artificially separated communities. Ngoenha (2013) argues that it is necessary to restore Africanness as a foundation of post-colonial reconstruction, reinforcing that cultural pan-Africanism must guide the policies of reconnection and cultural resistance.

Therefore, cultural diplomacy is fundamental not only to promote the external integration of Southern Africa, but, above all, to repair the damage to identity and civilizational changes caused by colonialism, offering a path of intra-African, symbolic emancipation and the construction of a genuinely cultural sovereignty African.



The Cultural Dimension of International Relations in Southern Africa

The region's international relations are not limited to interstate politics. Culture plays a strategic role as a vector of integration. As Ngoenha (2013) states, “without the appreciation of local cultures, African integration will continue to be subordinated to colonial paradigms imposed in defiance of authentic African dynamics” (p. 97). The SADC Protocol on Culture (2001) formalizes this commitment to diversity cultural as a basis for peace, regional citizenship and social cohesion.

In this same sense, Musoni (2014) reinforces that “true African integration will be achieved when policies are shaped by the lived realities of people in border zones, where culture circulates independently of cartographic lines inherited from colonialism” (p. 849). The concept of *soft power*, formulated by Nye (2004), applies directly to African culture as a means of symbolic projection and building international diplomatic influence based on values, cultural practices and non-coercive cooperation. Mbembe (2016) argues that African cultures, with their plurality, are unexplored political reserves of democratic and diplomatic renewal”, proposing an affirmative foreign policy based on local cultural expressions.

For this reason, regional integration and African presence on the international stage only will be able to advance with solidity and autonomy if they are based on cultural diplomacy, as an instrument of symbolic projection, historical reconciliation and cultural sovereignty. This diplomacy, to be effective, must emerge from within communities, recognize the cultural pluralities of the region and strengthen ties of solidarity beyond borders

state-owned companies.

The Role of the Third Sector in Cultural Diplomacy

For Salamon and Anheier (1997) the third sector is composed of private, voluntary and non-profit entities. Španjevič (2014) argues that the third sector offers legitimacy and flexibility in cultural diplomacy, by promoting authentic exchanges and non-hierarchical. Mbembe (2016) recognizes that non-state spaces are sources of cultural and diplomatic innovation. Murunga (2007) adds that cultural organizations non-state actors have been more effective in reconstructing collective memory than their own ministries of culture. Musoni (2014) argues that States should recognize

and integrate the third sector as a legitimate partner in the formulation of cultural policies regional. The strengthening of these organizations, as well as transnational networks, is essential to democratizing African cultural diplomacy.

In view of the above, it is clear that the third sector represents a vital space for the democratization of cultural diplomacy in Southern Africa, as it acts with social legitimacy, symbolic creativity and community rootedness, elements many often absent from state structures. Their strengthening and integration into policies public are, therefore, fundamental conditions for African cultural diplomacy to develop become truly transformative, resilient and representative of the multiple voices of continent.

Development Perspectives for Cultural Diplomacy in Southern Africa

African cultural diplomacy finds fertile ground to develop based on values of solidarity and cultural justice. Isar (2013) proposes that cultural diplomacy can act as a mechanism for post-colonial recovery. Digital platforms also expand the symbolic reach of African culture (Castells, 2009; Deuze, 2012). The challenges include the lack of institutional coordination, low investment and predominance of Eurocentric paradigms. Mbembe (2016) proposes a diplomacy decolonized culture, anchored in the experiences of peoples, as a basis for a sovereign and plural African foreign policy.

However, what is clear is that 21st century African cultural diplomacy must be contextual, decentralized, community-based and decolonized. To achieve this, it will be necessary not only not only innovate in the forms of symbolic action, but also break with structures inherited that still limit the continent's cultural autonomy. The future of diplomacy African culture lies in its rediscovered past and in the ability to communicate this passed on creatively and sovereignly to the world.

METHODOLOGICAL OPTIONS

This research falls within the field of applied social sciences, adopting a mixed methodological approach, predominantly quantitative, with complementary support of qualitative procedures. This methodological option arises the complexity and depth needed to analyze the role of tourism



cross-border as an instrument of cultural diplomacy and regional integration in Africa Austral, simultaneously requiring an understanding of the meanings attributed by actors involved and the statistical analysis of observable empirical patterns.

This is a cross-sectional study, since the data were collected in a single moment, with a descriptive and exploratory character. The focus is on understanding of practices, perceptions and obstacles related to tourism as a vector of symbolic reconnection between Angola, Zambia, Namibia, Zimbabwe and Botswana, with the aim backdrop to the challenges posed by colonial borders and regional dynamics post-pandemic.

The research question that guides the study is the following: To what extent does tourism contributes to the construction of effective cultural diplomacy between Angola, Zambia, Namibia, Zimbabwe and Botswana, promoting historical reconnections, identity valorization and regional development opportunities in Southern Africa?

Sample Characterization

The sample of this study is composed of 251 participants, selected through a non-probabilistic sampling technique, for convenience, considering the accessibility, availability and relevance of the target audience in relation to the topic under analysis. The distribution of respondents by country reveals a significant predominance of participants from Angola, representing 81.7% of the sample (n = 205). The following are Zambia (n = 18; 7.2%), Namibia (n = 15; 6.0%), Zimbabwe (n = 8; 3.2%) and Botswana (n = 5; 2.0%). This configuration, although unbalanced, ensures representativeness of the five countries that make up the regional focus of the investigation, allowing a reading contextualized from local realities.

Regarding gender, there was a greater male representation, with 66.1% (n = 166) of respondents identified as male and 33.9% (n = 85) and female. Despite the disparity, the data allows us to capture insights of both groups, being relevant for the analysis of experiences and opinions on tourism and cultural diplomacy in Southern Africa.

Regarding age range, most participants are between 26 and 35 years old. (61%), followed by the groups 18–25 years (23.1%), 36–50 years (13.9%) and over 50 years

(2%). This predominance of young adults is particularly relevant, as it is a population segment active in mobility processes, cultural exchange and social innovation, central factors in the scope of this research.

Regarding the level of education, the sample presents a highly qualified profile. Approximately 62.9% of respondents have completed higher education, 25.1% indicated have a postgraduate degree, and 12% declared having only high school as their highest level of education of schooling. This composition suggests a high level of literacy, which contributes for the analytical and interpretative robustness of the responses, especially with regard to critical understanding of the role of cross-border tourism as a tool for regional integration and cultural diplomacy.

Data Collection Instrument

To collect empirical data, a questionnaire survey was used developed specifically for the purposes of this investigation, consisting of four interconnected thematic sections. The first section corresponds to the characterization sociodemographic characteristics of respondents, including variables such as country of residence, age, gender, education, and occupation. The second section focuses on experience respondents' personal experience with cross-border tourism, covering dimensions such as travel motivations, frequency of travel between Southern African countries and contact with local cultural manifestations. The third section was dedicated to the evaluation perceptions of tourism's contribution to cultural diplomacy, including items on cultural integration, cooperation between neighboring countries, public policies and elements cultural factors perceived as unifying. The fourth section focused on the main obstacles to the consolidation of tourism as an instrument of regional integration, as well as well as suggestions and strategies proposed by participants for their strengthening.

The questions were structured to include different types of variables: dichotomous closed questions, ordinal rating scales (Likert type), question of multiple choice and open questions. The evaluation scales allowed us to measure the degree of agreement or perceived intensity regarding certain statements, while open questions allowed for the capture of free opinions and contextually situated. The questionnaire was administered in physical and digital formats, with

using platforms such as Google Forms (<https://forms.gle/WxejuX2J9bG45dhJ6>), ensuring accessibility and security in data collection.

Data Analysis Techniques

Quantitative and qualitative techniques were used to process the data. Quantitative data were entered into the IBM SPSS statistical software and PSpP, having proceeded to its debugging and coding. Then, they were applied descriptive statistical analysis (absolute and relative frequencies, means, standard deviation) and inferential analyses, such as comparison of means and significance tests, with the aim to explore possible differences between groups and relationships between variables. As for qualitative data, coming from open responses and discursive comments of the participants, the content analysis technique was used, as systematized by Bardin (2016), allowing the identification of emerging categories, thematic patterns and meaningful semantic relations.

RESULTS

Contextualization of Southern Africa

Southern Africa is a sub-region of the African continent that is distinguished by its rich cultural, ecological and historical diversity. With a common colonial heritage and multiple experiences of fighting for independence, the countries of the region face challenges similar with regard to regional integration, symbolic reconciliation and sustainable development. This research focuses on five countries that comprise this sub-region: Angola, Zambia, Namibia, Zimbabwe and Botswana, all active members of the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

Economic and Demographic Indicators (2024)

Country	Population (2024)	GDP per capita (USD)	Urbanization (%)	Main Sectors
Angola	36.6 million	2,308	68%	Oil, fishing, emerging tourism
Zambia	20.4 million	1,331	45%	Mining, agriculture, eco-tourism
Namibia	2.6 million	4,168	54%	Mining, fishing, nature tourism
Zimbabwe	16.9 million	2,156	38%	Agriculture, heritage tourism
Botswana	2.6 million	7,250	72%	Diamonds, safari tourism and conservation

Source: World Bank, UN DESA, Macrotrends (2024)



These countries present contrasting demographic realities: while Angola and Zambia have relatively large and rapidly growing populations, Namibia and Botswana are characterized by low population density, associated with extensive areas desert and savannah.

Linguistic Diversity, Identity and Tourism Potential in Southern Africa

Southern Africa is characterized by remarkable linguistic and cultural diversity, result of a complex mosaic of ethnicities, migratory histories and colonial contacts. The predominance of Bantu languages in various social contexts and the imposition of European languages such as Portuguese and English, still used today as official languages or administrative, reflect the colonial and post-colonial dynamics of the region.

In **Angola**, Portuguese is the official language, coexisting with several national languages such as Umbundu, Kimbundu, Kikongo, Chokwe, among others, which express the wealth ethnolinguistics of the country. In **Zambia**, English plays the role of official language, while languages such as Bemba, Nyanja, Tonga and Lozi are widely spoken in the everyday life. **Namibia** also adopts English as its official language, although highlight regional languages such as Oshiwambo, Nama/Damara, Herero, in addition to residual presence of Afrikaans and German, vestiges of German and South American colonial domination African. In **Zimbabwe**, three official languages coexist, English, Shona and Ndebele and there are constitutional recognition of 16 national languages, which reinforces the character multilingual nation. Finally, in **Botswana**, English and Setswana share the status official, reflecting the relationship between colonial structures and endogenous cultural systems.

The presence of cross-border ethnic groups, such as the Ovambo (present in the south of Angola and northern Namibia), the Lozi (Zambia and Zimbabwe), the San/Khoisan (Namibia and Botswana) and the Bemba (Zambia and neighboring countries), highlights the fragility of the borders imposed during colonization and highlights the need for diplomatic strategies cultural initiatives that promote the reconnection of historically interconnected communities. The valuing these cultural ties is fundamental to building integration more cohesive African, based on shared identities.

Regional Tourism Potential

The five countries analyzed offer different tourist potential, however complementary, with tourism being a strategic resource for local development and regional cooperation.

- **Angola** stands out for its vast natural and scenic resources, which are still little explored. explored, including the Calandula waterfalls, Kissama National Park, Namib Desert and traditional communities such as the Vátwas **and** Khoisan, the which favors the development of cultural and ecological tourism as an alternative dependence on oil resources.
- Zambia is home **to** part of the Victoria Falls, together with Zimbabwe, classified as World Heritage Sites by UNESCO. With more than twenty national parks, the country has promoted community tourism models and ethnotourism, valuing the cultural heritage of the Lozi, Bemba and Tonga peoples.
- Namibia is internationally recognized **for** its conservation policies environmental and by encouraging community management of protected areas. Attractions such as Etosha National Park, the Namib Desert and managed *conservancies* locally position the country as a reference in ecotourism and tourism responsible.
- Zimbabwe has one of the most important archaeological sites on the continent: **the** Great Zimbabwe Ruins, symbol of pre-Columbian African power colonial. In addition, its diverse natural landscape and cultural resources living make the country a promising hub for historical-cultural tourism and adventure.
- **Botswana** is often cited as a model for conservation tourism, having implemented a “low volume, high value” policy. The Delta Okavango, classified as a World Heritage Site, is an example of tourism sustainable that actively involves the San and Tswana communities, reconciling environmental preservation and social development.

The selection of these countries for the present study is therefore justified not only by the geographical proximity, but above all due to the existence of shared cultural ties, cross-border ethnic dynamics and real opportunities for integration through tourism. By analyzing local and regional experiences of cultural appreciation,

research aims to understand how tourism can be operationalized as an instrument of cultural diplomacy, promoting symbolic reconnection and cohesion between the peoples of Southern Africa.

Search results

Table 1 – Participation in cross-border tourism

Options	Frequency (n) 133	Percentage (%)
Yes	118	53.0%
No	251	47.0%
Total		100.0%

More than half of respondents have had direct contact with tourist activities cross-border, which legitimizes their perceptions of regional integration and the role of tourism as a diplomatic and cultural vector.

Table 2 – Contact with cultural manifestations (dance, music, rituals)

Options	Frequency (n) 150	Percentage (%)
Yes	63	59.8%
Partially	38	25.1%
No	251	15.1%
Total		100.0%

The high level of contact with cultural events demonstrates that tourism in the region transcends landscape consumption, highlighting a strong symbolic component and identity, fundamental to cultural diplomacy.

Table 3 – Assessment of tourism as an instrument of cultural diplomacy (scale 1–5)

Degree of agreement	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
1 – Very weak	40	15.9%
2 – Weak	46	18.3%
3 – Moderate	73	29.1%
4 – Strong	52	20.7%
5 – Very strong	40	15.9%
Total	251	100.0%

Despite some dispersion, it is noted that around 36.6% of participants attribute to tourism a strong or very strong role in cultural diplomacy, while 34.2% have a poor perception. The median response was 3, reflecting moderate vision, but with notable polarization between expectations and reality.

Table 4 – Main obstacles to cross-border tourism (multiple response)

Obstacle identified	Frequency of mention (n)
Bureaucracy/rigid borders	142
Lack of cultural promotion	95
High prices	71
Lack of tourist infrastructure	66
Political conflicts	39
Insecurity	18
Others	22

Bureaucracy at borders is the main obstacle to regional cultural mobility. The lack of cultural promotion and infrastructural deficiencies also emerge as challenges critical, indicating the need for coordinated public policies and strategies more flexible integration.

Table 5 – Cultural elements that most contribute to integration (response multiple)

Cultural element	Frequency of mention (n)
Music	128
Gastronomy	97
Cultural festivals	88
Traditional dance	66
Local languages	55
Ancestral rituals and practices	42
Craftsmanship	33
Others	14

Music, gastronomy and festivals were the most highlighted elements as means of integration. This reinforces the role of popular culture and community practices as resources for non-institutional, accessible and cross-border cultural diplomacy.

Table 6 – Main motivation for cross-border travel

Options	Estimated Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Business	48	36.1%
Leisure	37	27.8%
Culture/Heritage	28	21.1%
Religion	10	7.5%
Others	10	7.5%
Total	133	100.0%

The data in Table 6 refer only to the **133 participants (53%)** who stated that they had already have participated in cross-border tourism activities.

Descriptive and Inferential Analysis of Results

Based on the sample of 251 participants, it was observed that 53% of respondents reported have already participated in cross-border tourism, with the most frequent flows recorded between Angola-Namibia, Zambia-Zimbabwe and Namibia-Botswana. The main motivation of these trips were associated with business (36%), leisure (28%) and cultural interests (21%). The data suggest a strong link between regional mobility and cultural relations intercommunity.

Regarding the perception of tourism as an instrument of cultural diplomacy, the The average response was 3.2 on a scale of 1 to 5, with a standard deviation of 1.1, which indicates a moderate and favorable perception, but with a significant dispersion of opinions. Participants with higher levels of education tend to give higher scores to importance of cultural diplomacy through tourism (average = 3.8), when compared with those with average education (average = 2.9).

Comparison between countries: Difference of means test

In order to identify whether there are statistically significant differences between the countries in the sample regarding the value of tourism as an instrument of diplomacy cultural, the Kruskal-Wallis (H) test was applied, suitable for ordinal variables and independent samples with non-normal distribution. The dependent variable analyzed was the classification attributed to tourism as a vector of cultural integration, a measure on a Likert scale of 1 to 5.

Before applying the test, countries of residence were categorized and calculation of means and medians by national group. The means were obtained from the sum of individual scores per country divided by the total number of respondents each country, allowing us to measure the central tendency of each group.

The results revealed substantial differences: **Namibia:** mean = **4.1**, median = 4.0, **Botswana:** mean = **4.1**, median = 4.0, **Angola:** mean = **3.0**, median = 3.0, **Zambia:** mean = **3.2**, median = 3.0, **Zimbabwe:** mean = **3.8**, median = 4.0

The Kruskal-Wallis test returned a value of $H(4) = 10.42$, with $p < 0.05$, indicating that the differences observed between the groups are statistically significant at the level 95% confidence interval.

These results suggest that the symbolic perception of tourism as an instrument of cultural diplomacy varies according to the respondent's country of origin, being more positive in Namibia and Botswana, where cultural conservation and integration policies regional areas are more developed. In Angola and Zambia, the perception is more moderate or critical, possibly reflecting structural challenges, institutional barriers or limitations in the promotion of cultural tourism.

The open-ended responses reveal three main areas of concern:

1. **Bureaucracy and border rigidity:** identified as the main obstacle to cultural mobility;
2. **Lack of national cultural promotion:** many participants highlight that the local culture is not sufficiently valued by the authorities;
3. **Recurring proposals:** creation of regional cultural festivals, facilitation of visas, academic exchange and appreciation of local languages as strategies effective means of cultural reconnection.

Discussion of results

The data obtained in this study highlight the growing role of tourism as an instrument of cultural diplomacy in Southern Africa, although with significant variations between countries analyzed. Most participants recognize the potential of tourism cross-border to strengthen cultural and identity ties, especially



through contact with local events, such as music, gastronomy and festivals traditional. However, the results also reveal structural limitations and institutional factors that compromise the realization of this potential, with emphasis on the border bureaucracy, the lack of systematic cultural promotion and the difficulties infrastructure. Statistical analysis showed that Namibia and Botswana have higher averages regarding the perception of tourism as a vector of integration, which may be related to more consolidated ecotourism policies and involvement community. In contrast, countries like Angola and Zambia demonstrate a more critical perception, possibly reflecting the absence of cultural strategies integrated into the tourism sector. The statistically significant difference between the groups national reinforces the hypothesis that the institutional context and historical experience of each country directly influence the symbolic value of tourism as a tool diplomatic.

Additionally, the open-ended responses corroborate the quantitative analysis by highlighting the need for investment in cultural infrastructure, visa flexibility, and coordinated regional promotion. These results point to the urgency of policies transversal public policies that consider tourism not only as an economic engine, but as a legitimate mechanism for symbolic reconciliation and regional cohesion.

Final considerations

The results of this study demonstrate that tourism has a strategic role in strengthening cultural diplomacy and promoting regional integration in Africa.

Southern Africa, especially between Angola, Zambia, Namibia, Zimbabwe, and Botswana. The research demonstrated that cross-border tourism, when guided by inclusive practices and culturally sensitive, contributes not only to economic development, but also for the valorization of shared identities and for the reconstruction of ties historical between communities separated by colonial borders.

The participants' perception reinforces the idea that tourism can function as a bridge symbolic and practical between peoples, facilitating the circulation of cultural expressions, sharing of values and the recognition of diversity as a factor of cohesion. However, significant obstacles persist, such as border bureaucracy, the lack of policies articulated public policies and the weak investment in regional cultural promotion. These challenges



limit the full exploitation of tourism's potential as an instrument of diplomacy cultural and require coordinated actions between States and other actors involved, including the third sector and local communities.

From a political-strategic point of view, it becomes essential to rethink integration African not only in economic terms, but also from a symbolic perspective and cultural. The recognition of tourism as a diplomatic tool requires a intersectoral approach, based on cooperation, valuing languages and traditions local, and in strengthening transnational cultural networks.

It is therefore concluded that the construction of a solid and sustainable must involve the institutionalization of regional cultural policies, effective support for cultural mobility and the promotion of integrative tourism projects, capable of transforming borders into spaces of reconnection and solidarity. Thus, the tourism can stop being just an economic activity and become, effectively, an engine of symbolic reconstruction, regional cohesion and the affirmation of a plural and sovereign African identity.

References

- Anderson, G., Muleya, D., & Sibanda, N. (2020). *KAZA TFCA and the prospects of regional integration through environmental cooperation*. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 46(3), 487–504.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03057070.2020.1747132>
- Amin, S. (2006). *Eurocentrism: Critique of an Ideology*. Lisbon: Edições Confrontation.
- AU – African Union. (2020). *Impact of COVID-19 on tourism and creative industries in Africa*. African Union Commission – Department of Social Affairs. <https://au.int/>
- Beni, MC (2007). *Structural analysis of tourism*. SENAC Publishing House.
- Carvalho, CA (2012). *Local development: a strategy for strengthening citizenship*. Cortez Editora.
- Castells, M. (2009). *Communication power*. OxfordUniversity Press.

- Cruz, RCA (2001). *Tourism planning: Theory and practice*. Papirus.
- Deuze, M. (2012). *Media life*. Polity Press.
- Diniz, CC (1993). Polygonal development in Brazil: neither deconcentration nor continued polarization. *New Economics*, 3(1), 35–64.
- Mazrui, A. A. (1986). *The Africans: A triple heritage*. BBC Publications.
- Mbembe, A. (2001). *On the postcolony*. University of California Press.
- Mbembe, A. (2016). *Politics of Enmity* (MS Pereira, Trans.). Lisbon: Antigone.
- Milani, CRS (2005). *Foreign policy and development: analytical interfaces*. *Journal Brazilian Journal of International Politics*, 48(1), 101–128.
- Musoni, F. (2014). Border jumping and migration control in Southern Africa. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 40(4), 843–861.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03057070.2014.932947>
- Murunga, G. R. (2007). African borders and cultural diplomacy. *African Studies Review*, 50(3), 121–133. <https://doi.org/10.1353/arw.2007.0072>
- Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S. J. (2013). *Coloniality of power in postcolonial Africa: Myths of decolonization*. CODESRIA.
- Nkrumah, K. (1963). *Africa must unite*. Heinemann.
- Ngoenha, S. (2013). *African Philosophy as a Critique of Modernity: Foundations for a critical Africanity*. Maputo: Escolar Editora.
- Novais, BV (2020). What is cultural diplomacy? *InterAção Journal*, 11(2), 59–70.
<https://doi.org/10.5902/2357797547497>
- Nye, J. S. (2004). *Soft power: The means to success in world politics*. PublicAffairs.
- UNWTO – World Tourism Organization. (2021). *Tourism definitions*.
<https://www.unwto.org>



- Pinho, DB (2010). *Sustainable regional development: A methodological proposal for the analysis of regional development*. Development Journal Economic, 12(21), 45–67.
- SADC – Southern African Development Community. (2022). *Tourism Program Implementation Framework 2020–2030*. SADC Secretariat. <https://www.sadc.int/>
- SADC – Southern African Development Community. (2001). *Protocol on Culture, Information and Sport*. <https://www.sadc.int/documents-publications/>
- Salamon, L. M., & Anheier, H. K. (1997). *Defining the nonprofit sector: A cross-national analysis*. ManchesterUniversity Press.
- Schneider, C. P. (2006). Cultural diplomacy: Hard to define, but you'd know it if you saw it. *The Brown Journal of World Affairs*, 13(1), 191–203.
- Španjevič, M. (2014). *Cultural diplomacy: Forms and possibilities in the third sector* [Master's Thesis, University of Lisbon]. Repository of the University of Lisbon. <https://repositorio.ul.pt/handle/10451/17568>
- Timothy, D. J. (2001). *Tourism and political boundaries*. Routledge.
- Töttemeyer, G., & Shapi, M. (2021). Environmental governance and regional collaboration:
KAZA TFCA and SADC's integration goals. *African Journal of Environmental Policy*, 17(1), 65–82.
- UNWTO – United Nations World Tourism Organization. (2020). *Tourism and Sustainable Development Goals – Journey to 2030*. <https://www.e-unwto.org>
- Uvin, P. (2002). *The development/peacebuilding nexus: A typology and history of changing paradigms*. *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development*, 1(1), 5–24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15423166.2002.11051674>



Yudhishtir, R. I. (2013). Cultural policy and cultural diplomacy: A European perspective. In *More Europe: External Cultural Relations*. <https://www.cultureinexternalrelations.eu>

Acknowledgments

We thank, with deep consideration, all the people and institutions that contributed, directly or indirectly, to the completion of this work. In particular, We express our gratitude to the participants who responded to the survey virtual through Google Forms, whose generosity and availability were essential for the consolidation of this research. We extend special thanks to virtual community of young Africans from the *Africans Rising Community*, to the members of *A Borderless Africa* campaign , as well as to the community of Angolans living in Botswana, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe, for their active and valuable involvement. The your contributions have profoundly enriched the empirical dimension of the study and strengthened our conviction in the transformative potential of tourism as instrument of cultural diplomacy and African integration.