

Research Paper

Visitor management and sustainable destination management nexus in Zegie Peninsula, Northern Ethiopia

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ABSTRACT

Visitor management becomes a core element of sustainable destination management in the wake of a continuously growing tourism sector. The current study examines how effective visitor management contributes to sustainable tourism destination development employing the triple-bottom-line concept. The study adopts a qualitative research approach with an exploratory design and collects qualitative data from purposively selected participants. Data collection took place between December 2017 and April 2018. Research findings inform that proper visitor management practices further strengthen sustainable tourism destination development. Even though, inadequate, visitor management is currently practiced in Zegie Peninsula. However, ensuring broad-based tourism stakeholder engagement to sustain the proper development of tourism remains a challenge. This study advances our understanding of the inextricable links among visitor management practices, stakeholder engagement, and sustainable destination development. Visitor management concepts compatible with sustainable tourism development are suggested along with study limitations and opportunities for future research.

1. Introduction

Sustainable tourism development is promoted as a framework to improve environmental, socio-cultural and economic development in tourist destinations (He, He, & Xu, 2018; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2018; Neto, 2003; Sharpley, 2000). In this juncture, the link between sustainable destination development and visitor management (VM) becomes inseparable (Gebrekios, 2016; Leung, Spenceley, Hvenegaard, & Buckley, 2018; Pearce, 2017; Vafadari, 2008). Visitor interactions with the natural and cultural destinations occur in unique historical, cultural and geographical settings involving interrelated values and interests. These interactions require the development of tourism sensitive and responsible to antique historical and natural resources in line with the principles of triple-bottom-line (Mason, 2005a; UNWTO, 2017; Wong, McIntosh, & Ryan, 2016). Since minimizing undesirable consequences of tourism on destinations through regulating visitor flow is the central aim of visitor management (Guilarte & González, 2018; Mason, 2005b), efficient use of visitor management techniques facilitates sustainable tourism development (Guilarte & González, 2018; Pearce, 2017). The continuous growth of tourism leads to environmental damage causing community distrust which requires systems and policies of visitor management that regulate tourist flows and address associated impacts (Leung et al., 2018; Ritchie & Crouch, 2010).

In the context of developing countries, visitor management (VM) received inadequate attention both from the industry and academia (Spenceley, Kohl, McArthur, Myles, & Notarianni, 2015). Destination development practitioners face scarcity of clear, up-to-date and comprehensive guidelines to effectively operate visitor management fundamentals (Albrecht, 2017; Garrod, Fyall, & Leask, 2006; Leung et al., 2018). Extant research tends to discuss rather visitor management tools related to price, access management, education and interpretation in isolation overlooking the inextricable linkage among these concepts and overall strategic approach to manage destination and visitor experience (Albrecht, 2017; Leung et al., 2018; Mason, 2005b). Garrod et al. (2006) and Leung et al. (2018) suggested the identification and adoption of best visitor management practices on a case-by-case basis through qualitative research. Therefore, there is a real and immediate need to conduct research that combines both hard and soft visitor management practices (Mason, 2005b). Tourist destinations in Ethiopia are characterized by ineffective visitor management practices (Jones, 2012; Tessema, Lilieholm, Ashenafi, & Leader-Williams, 2010; UNECA, 2015), which led to incompetent tourist destinations currently (Michelle & Cole, 2009; Tegegne, Moyle, & Becken, 2018).

Zegie Peninsula is among the most visited tourist sites found in Amhara National Regional State, Northern Ethiopia. Its geographical proximity to the city of Bahir Dar, availability of good transportation

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access (air and land) and the presence of immense natural, cultural and religious treasures make the area to be frequented by both international and domestic tourists (Amhara National Regional State Culture and Tourism Bureau, 2017). So far, few research works have been conducted in Zegie Peninsula among which the role of community empowerment for sustainable tourism development (Alubele, 2011), ecotourism services and tourism potentials in the Peninsula of Lake Tana (Worku, 2017) and ecotourism in Lake Tana region, potentials for the implementation of community-based ecotourism (Sefrin, 2012) can be mentioned.

Therefore, the concept of visitor management as a topical agenda for sustainable tourism development in Zegie Peninsula has been neglected for long. Moreover, pressing issues such as crafting practical visitor management tools and assessing stakeholder engagement in implementing visitor management tools are not yet explored. Furthermore, as it is underscored by Albrecht (2017), generally, issues of visitor management receive sparse attention in tourism literature. According to Smith (2016) and UNWTO (2018b), how attractions can be better managed, communicated and projected to visitors with meaningful involvement and experience in sensitive places such as Zegie Peninsula merits a closer examination. In addition, given tourism in Zegie Peninsula is in its early phase of development according to Butler's (1980) Tourist Area Life Cycle (TALC from now on), a closer investigation of visitor management as a research agenda offers extensive benefits towards propelling the sustainable development of tourism in the future. In light of that, this study intends to contribute to the gap in the current literature by exploring the role of visitor management in driving sustainable destination development through effective stakeholder partnership in Zegie Peninsula. Specifically, this research aims:

1. To inspect whether, or not visitor management tools are currently practiced in Zegie Peninsula;
2. To examine the extent to which visitor management tools are implemented;
3. To delve the degree of stakeholders' engagement in visitor management;
4. To further substantiate how visitor management strategies enhance sustainable tourism development in Zegie Peninsula and
5. To suggest relevant visitor management tools to Zegie Peninsula that can also be adapted to other similar tourist destinations.

2. Theoretical background

Visitor management refers to the application of management tools and interventions to regulate the flow, movement, and behavior of visitors in tourist destinations (Albrecht, 2017). It highlights concepts such as visitor experience, service quality, use of indicators and information panels, frameworks and interpretation tools in relation to environmental, socio-cultural, political and economic dimensions of a destination (Albrecht, 2017; Mason, 2005a; Moscardo, 2003). Per se, visitor management encompasses a wide range of activities that can be adapted and implemented in line with the unique characteristics of tourist destinations (Hughes, Bond, & Ballantyne, 2013). Visitor management can be practiced explicitly and implicitly within every destination in relation to tourist attractions, amenities, and facilities (Albrecht, 2017; Guilarte & González, 2018). Consequently, tourist facilities and amenities and any other tourism-related goods and services are part and parcel of visitor management scheme that convey additional information to visitors on top of what tour guides explain (Albrecht, 2017; Wong et al., 2016). Therefore, the standard and quality of tourist facilities and services need to be highlighted in destinations' visitor management plan (VMP) as decisive elements of effective visitor management strategy. A visitor management plan is a strategy that enables attractions to achieve sustainable destination development by providing consistent and reliable visitor experience,

monitoring and prevention of vandalism and kleptocracy (Sonmez, 2002). The visitor management plan should identify clear tourism and visitor management objectives that are properly linked to conservation values (Leung et al., 2018). Through implementing different operational and policy directives, visitor management contributes to the conservation and sustainable development of historic, cultural and natural sites (Albrecht, 2017; Vafadari, 2008).

According to Mason (2005b), there are three ways of managing visitors in tourist destinations. These are: (1) controlling the number of visitors either by limiting numbers to commensurate carrying capacity, or regulating tourist flow throughout the year, instead of catering to a given tourist season, (2) boosting destinations resilience to cope up with the inflow of visitors and (3) modifying visitors' behavior through sustained and effective interpretations and awareness creation schemes. From a biological and ecosystem standpoint, carrying capacity is understood as the maximum number of population within the ecosystem's ability to support before eminent damage occurs (Chapman & Byron, 2018). The UNWTO (1981, p. 4) defined carrying capacity as 'the maximum number of people that may visit a tourist destination at the same time, without destroying the physical, economic, socio-cultural environment and an unacceptable decrease in the quality of visitors' satisfaction.' Based on Mathieson and Wall (1982) description, carrying capacity is the maximum number of people who can use a recreational area without resulting in an unacceptable decline in the quality of the environment. Saveriades (2000, P. 147) explained the concept of carrying capacity in relation to sustainability as 'the sustainability of a specific level of tourist development and use within a specified region.' Therefore, attractions found in tourist destinations need to devise proper visitor management strategies including carrying capacity practices. Understanding destinations' specific contexts and ensuring broad-based participation of tourism actors are also among the critical elements of effective visitor management (Guilarte & González, 2018). In fact, destinations might have a different set of resilience and tolerance threshold to external pressure in line with their specific development stage (Butler, 1980). In his seminal work titled "The Concept of a Tourist Area Cycle of Evolution: Implications for Management of Resources", Butler (1980), modeled the evolution of tourist destinations. Section 2.1 below encapsulates Butler's (1980) work to relate the current developmental phase of Zegie Peninsula and thereby to recommend appropriate visitor management tools as well as to justify why such visitor management techniques are appropriate in line with Butler's TALC model.

2.1. Tourist area/destination life cycle

Butler (1980) noted that a tourist destination undergoes through a six-phase of development life cycle, usually in an evolutionary sequence. Despite substantial critiques, Butler's (1980) TALC model remains one of the most referred theories of destination evolution in tourism literature (LY, 2018). According to Butler's (1980) explanation, this "S" curve TALC model (refer to Fig. 1) has significant implications both in the planning and management of tourist resources in the light of a continuing decline of environmental quality and thereby the attractiveness of numerous tourist destinations. Each of the six specific TALC stages is featured by a unique spectrum of social, geographic and economic indicators (LY, 2018). These stages are: (1) exploration, (2) involvement, (3) development, (4) consolidation, (5) stagnation and (6) decline/rejuvenation.

In the exploration stage, tourist destinations experience limited tourist arrivals, usually explorers. Travel patterns are irregular with considerably high use of local facilities and frequent contact with residents given the absence of widespread commercial facilities. In this phase of tourism development, tourism does not affect the physical milieu and social fabric of the tourist destination. As a result, community resentment and environmental destruction are inexistent. The contribution of tourism to the economic and social wellbeing of

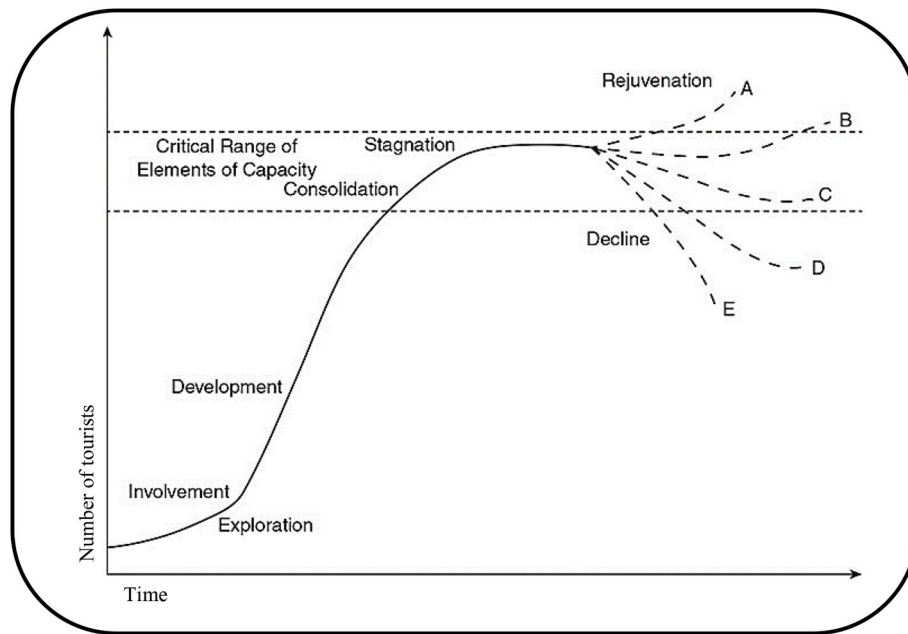


Fig. 1. Butler's (1980) tourist area life cycle.

communities residing in the destination is minimal. Involvement is the second phase, where some communities tend to be attracted by tourism and join the sector by providing facilities primarily for visitors. Host-guest interaction starts to increase with more local involvement and commercial activities begin to flourish and attract more visitors. Moreover, organized travel arrangements can be expected, and the local government starts to feel the pressure of providing additional tourist facilities to meet the growing need of the sector. In the development phase, tourist flow rapidly increases, and more foreign-owned enterprises take control of the tourism business with intensive advertising, improved accessibility, and the employment of migrant labor changing the tourism landscape in the destination. The consolidation phase, which follows the development stage, on the other hand, is characterized by a declining growth rate. In this stage, tourism becomes a major economic sector in the destination and heavy commercials attract new visitors that trigger some local opposition towards tourism due to negative consequences such as crowdedness, inflation, crime, and resource use conflict. In this stage, destinations experience high tourism density and product deterioration. As a continuation of consolidation, stagnation, by contrast, is epitomized by exceeded tourist capacity, where the tourism sector predominantly relies on repeat visits and conventions. Surplus hotel capacity and changes in ownership, focus on package tours and continued pressing tourism-related problems characterize the stagnation phase. Following stagnation, a tourist destination might enter into either a decline stage or a rejuvenation phase. A destination rapidly loses its reputation and market share and predominantly relies on weekenders and day visitors as vacationers if it enters into a decline phase. Local resentment towards visitors might be frequent and ultimately the area may become a regular tourist slum losing its touristic reputé altogether. However, a destination may also enter into another phase called rejuvenation through a complete change of attractions (addition of a man-made attraction or the creation of a new tourist market by employing previously untapped natural resources).

Taking Butler's (1980) TALC model into account, the current tourism development phase of Zegie Peninsula relates to the involvement stage, where a considerable tourist flow is evident with growing community participation and increasing pressure for further infrastructural and facility development to properly cater to visitors. Therefore, from a sustainable development point of view, the

involvement stage is enormously vital to deter the advent of negative tourism impacts thereby extending the life cycle of the destination. In this respect, the proper formulation and application of effective visitor management techniques are instrumental (Alazaizeh & Hallo, 2017; Leung et al., 2018; Mason, 2005b; Vafadari, 2008). Along with that, a grassroots stakeholder participation in the formulation and implementation of visitor management techniques should be underlined (Lee, 2013; Liu et al., 2014; Michael, Mgonja, & Backman, 2013; Mitchell & Coles, 2009; UNWTO, 2018b).

Studies (e.g. Ferreira & Harmse, 2014; Hassanli, 2017) uncovered poor grassroots participation as a pressing challenge in ensuring successful visitor management in many developing countries. For instance, even though visitor management is practiced in Kruger National Park, South Africa, the park is still facing challenges arising from the poor implementation of management strategies due to poor stakeholder participation in the formulation phase of strategies in addition to the inaccurate estimation of carrying capacity and lack of clear park demarcation (Ferreira & Harmse, 2014). Subsequently, depending on legal, political and social contexts, protected areas and cultural heritage sites need to draft and implement functional visitor management plans with clear-cut guidelines and sound participation of pertinent tourism stakeholders if they aspire to pave a road to sustainable destination development (Albrecht, 2017; IUCN, 2018; Leung et al., 2018; Vafadari, 2008). Deliberate or inadvertent neglect to the wise use of visitor management practices could result in irreversible environmental and cultural disaster, which in turn leads to a vicious circle of climate change, ecosystem destruction and poverty trap (IUCN, 2018; Leung et al., 2018; Mason, 2005a).

In the context of Ethiopia, so far, the practice of visitor management is poor (Amare, 2015; Tessema et al., 2010). A study by Gebrekiros (2016), reported challenges such as inefficient practice of zoning and poor carrying capacity estimation, inappropriate waste management and lack of commitment among stakeholders in managing visitors and unsuccessful site interpretation in Axum City (a UNESCO Heritage Site and one of the most renowned tourist destinations in the country). To that end, the current study critically examines hard visitor management tools together with environmental information and interpretation tools (soft visitor management tools) and recommends how they can be better utilized to protect Zegie Peninsula from an ecological, socio-cultural and economic crisis in the long-run.

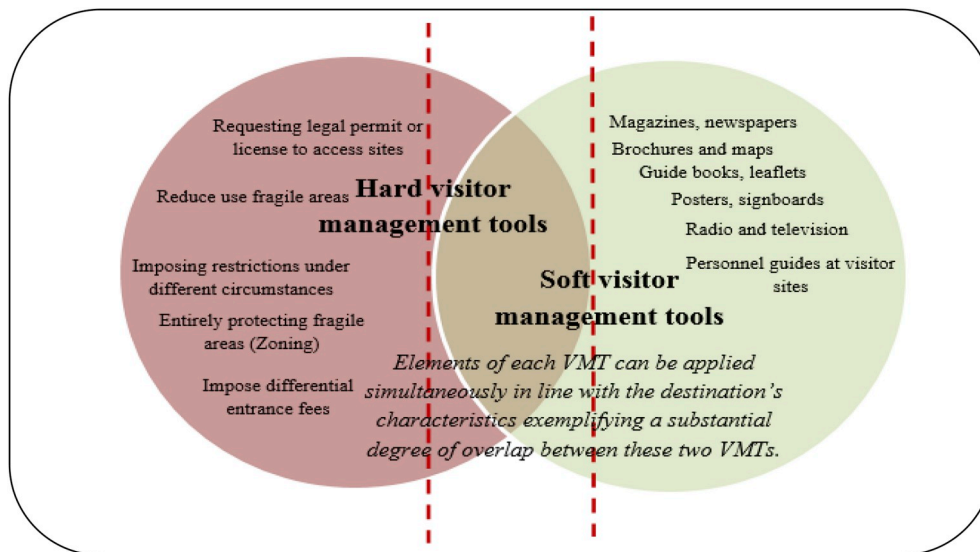


Fig. 2. Hard and soft visitor management tools.

2.2. Hard versus soft visitor management tools

Information dissemination tools (see Fig. 2) also known as soft visitor management strategies such as printed materials including maps, guidebooks, brochures, information boards, and signage need to deliver adequate and accurate information about a tourist destination and its attractions. Verbal information given by guides or environmentalists, radio and TV are vital in disseminating reliable information about the nature and characteristics of tourist destinations (Baltic Sea Region Program, 2011; Hassanli, 2017; Mason, 2005b). Better information access, in turn, increases visitors' awareness, which contributes towards the creation of long-lasting effects in the sustainable development efforts of a tourist destination (Hassanli, 2017; Leung et al., 2018). On the other hand, hard visitor management tools such as zoning, price discrimination, access restrictions and less frequent use of fragile and sensitive areas can be implemented under different circumstances in tourist destinations. It is from this standpoint that stakeholders in tourism destinations should find the right balance of soft VM tools and hard VM tools to effectively respond to ecosystem destruction (Alazaizeh & Hallo, 2017; Albrecht, 2017; Mason, 2005b). As Table 1 reveals, the values of education and interpretation as soft VM tools are increasingly considered as a viable strategy to alter visitors' behavior in a more efficient manner (Hassanli, 2017).

Hassanli (2017) benchmarked (see Table 1) soft visitor management approaches against hard visitor management approaches that are often adopted by destination management organizations. From this contrast, it is possible to understand the vivid difference between these two approaches in terms of involving visitors in a more willing and self-engaging manner.

Therefore, tourism stakeholders shall blend these two approaches of visitor management strategies in accordance with specific destination attributes as depicted in Fig. 2 (Presenza & Cipollina, 2010). For example, in sacred religious heritage sites such as Zegie Peninsula, noise should be properly controlled not only through posting signs but also through imposing time and access restrictions as required (Hassanli,

2017). In other words, religious sites in the Peninsula should be closed for visitors during early morning religious rituals so that tourism activities do not disrupt local religious practices. The major stakeholders whose support and participation are key for the successful operationalization of visitor management strategies include the government, tour operators, travel agents, tour guides, local communities, and transportation service providers (Leask, 2010). Stakeholders in tourist destinations are vital to improve tourism consumption and visitor management practices (Leung et al., 2018; UNWTO, 2018b). Destination management organizations coupled with tourism business operators can drive sustainable tourism development by properly enforcing effective visitor management tools (Klimek, 2013). Literature (Cooper & Hall, 2016; Garcia, 2013) accentuated that the development of sustainable tourism involves a great deal of participatory, responsive and trustful interactions among stakeholders. Genuine participation, in turn, triggers prolonged engagement and positive evaluation of actors towards tourism development (Ap, 1992; Chuang, 2010; Lee, 2013).

2.3. The triple-bottom-line concept

The triple-bottom-line concept has emanated from the business discipline by Elkington (1998) with the aim to increase corporate accountability in social, economic and environmental frontiers (Hede, 2007; Rogers & Ryan, 2001; Tyrrell, Paris, & Biaett, 2012). From the tourism domain, the concept of triple-bottom-line refers to the management of resources where all environmental, economic and socio-cultural fabrics of a destination are maintained (Buckley, 2003b). Subsequently, "triple-bottom-line" (see Fig. 3) views environmental, socio-cultural and economic aspects in combination as a single framework instead of as separate entities (Michael et al., 2013; Stoddard, Pollard, & Evans, 2012). Buckley (2003b), Michael et al. (2013) and Stoddard et al. (2012) suggested the use of triple-bottom-line over the term sustainability due to the vagueness of the concept of sustainability. As a result, researchers prefer to employ the triple-bottom-line concept over the concept of sustainability in the current study due to its

Table 1
Hard and soft visitor management approaches.

Hard VM approaches	Soft VM approaches
• Visitors need to obtain a legal permit or license to access sites • Imposing time restrictions to control noise	• Verbally communicating expected behavior to visitors • Posting signs (e.g. visitor codes of conduct) • Segmenting visitors based on their needs, values, and profiles

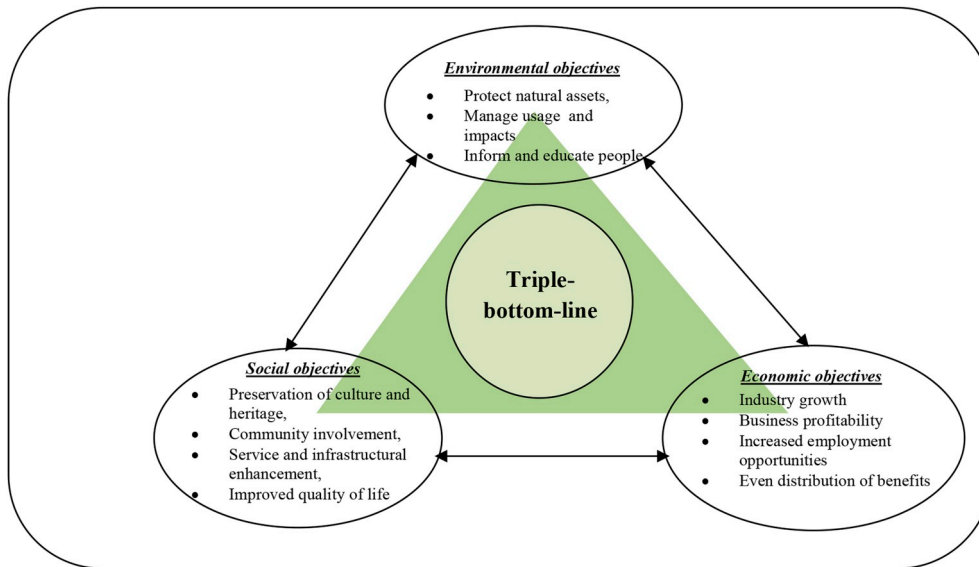


Fig. 3. Fundamental pillars of the triple-bottom-line concept.

simplicity and measurability in contrast to the concept of sustainability. The work of Tyrrell et al. (2012) supported this by quantifying the triple-bottom-line concept empirically using a choice-based conjoint model to provide a practical tool for the evaluation of tourism impacts in terms of social, environmental and economic aspects within a community as a tool for proactive sustainable development. The tourism sector provides with an ideal venue to examine the applicability of triple-bottom-line, given its multifaceted nature and the involvement of diverse stakeholders with competing interests (Buckley, 2003b; Faux & Dwyer, 2009). Due to its clear-cut principles, the triple-bottom-line concept enables destination development and management stakeholders to simultaneously consider environmental, social and economic frontiers in the decision-making process (Hede, 2007; Michael et al.,

2013; Stoddard et al., 2012).

Tourist destinations can gain enormous benefits such as improved destination management, improved market positioning, better stakeholder relationships, collaborations and comprehensive strategic decision-making from embracing the triple-bottom-line concept (Dwyer, 2015; Stoddard et al., 2012). The concept of triple-bottom-line has been adopted and used in tourism research on various occasions such as to enhance sustainable community development (Rogers & Ryan, 2001), to measure the effectiveness of geo-tourism and ecotourism (Buckley, 2003b) and to explain the impact of tourism on local communities (Tyrrell et al., 2012). In the current study, the concept of "triple-bottom-line" is employed to examine the comprehensiveness and efficiency of visitor management practices and its role in facilitating sustainable

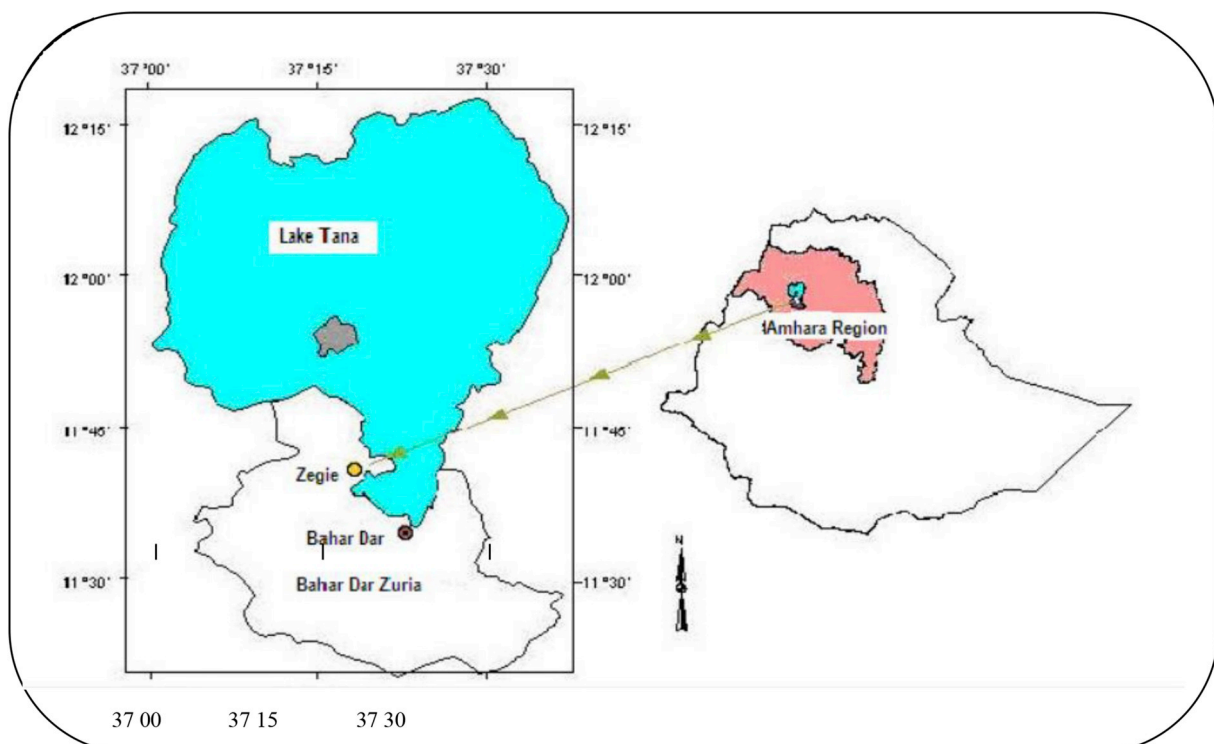


Fig. 4. Map of the study area (Alelign, Teketay, Yemshaw, & Edwards, 2007).

tourism destination development and management in Zegie Peninsula, Northern Ethiopia.

3. Methodology

3.1. Setting the research context

This study was conducted in Zegie Peninsula, a place located in Northwestern Ethiopia 600 km North of Addis Ababa (see Fig. 4). The Peninsula has an elevation that ranges from 1770 MASL along the shore of Lake Tana, the largest highland lake in Ethiopia and the source of The Blue Nile, to 1975 MASL at its summit known as Ararat. Monasteries on Zegie Peninsula are located on the Southern shore of Lake Tana. Zegie Peninsula with its evergreen forested ecosystem is home to nine ancient monasteries rich with antique religious heritage. Zegie Peninsula monasteries also had served as a safe shelter to enormous ancient Orthodox Christian religious relics against destruction, theft, and vandalism in medieval Ethiopia. Because of that, the Peninsula is a center of tourist attraction. Visitors access the Peninsula by boat and by bus from the city of Bahir Dar, the capital of Amhara National Regional State (Amhara National Regional State Culture and Tourism Bureau, 2017). Between December 2017 and April 2018, the researchers made frequent visits to the study area to establish rapport with potential research participants and to collect data through field observation and in-depth interviews.

3.2. Research design

Since the current study aims to explore fundamental issues concerning visitor management in relation to sustainable tourism, it adopts an exploratory research design. The researchers believe that the topic at hand merits a close examination where qualitative research approach permits in-depth exploration of data to adequately address research questions from participants' points of view (Cameron, 2009; Creswell, 2013).

3.3. Study population and participant selection

Given visitor management and sustainable tourism development involve diverse stakeholders, the current study considers multiple participants as a research subject using clearly defined criteria such as knowledge or awareness and experience in visitor management issues. The main subjects of this study comprise travel agents, tour guides, monastery representatives, governmental tourism organizations (local and regional), academicians, transport service providers, local community representatives, and souvenir shop owners. In addition, visitors (both domestic and overseas) participated in the study. Participants were recruited using purposive sampling for key informants and convenient sampling for visitors.

Accordingly, three experts working in tour and travel companies were interviewed. According to the local tourism department, there are five administrative Kebeles in Zegie Peninsula. In each Kebele, one representative was purposely selected. Thus, five community representatives were chosen. In addition, three monastery representatives, three senior tour guides, five government tourism experts, three regional and two local, and three tourism academic professionals were also interviewed to extract in-depth information to adequately address research objectives. Two key informants from the associations of local transport service providers and souvenir shop owners that operate in the study area were also recruited (see Table 2).

Evidently, in tourist destinations visitor management tools are designed to manage visitors and make their experience enjoyable and enriching (Leung et al., 2018; El-Barmelgy, 2013). Hence, capturing visitors' opinion about the existing visitor management practices is crucial to pinpoint defects in the eyes of consumers for future improvement (Petric & Mandic, 2014). As a result, the current study

Table 2
Study population, samples taken and rationale of selection.

Stakeholder	Number of companies/associations/tourism experts	Selected	Reasons for recruitment
1 Tour operator and travel agents	4 private tour and travel companies	3	They arrange tours to domestic and international visitors and have experience in managing tours and visitors in the study area. They formulate tourism policies and follow up on visitor management issues executed by all tourism stakeholders in the study area.
2 Government tourism experts both local and regional	8 tourism experts	5	
3 Monastery staff	11 monastery management authorities	3	They have extensive contact with all visitors and are directly involved in managing the ancient monasteries. They actively engage in providing services to visitors and have a stake in conserving their environment. They are owners of most tourism products in the study area.
4 Local community representatives	5 Kebele representatives	5	
5 Tourism professionals at the university level	8 tourism professionals at the university level	3	University professionals are also key tourism stakeholders and play a substantial role in capacity building programs for tourism service providers.
6 Tour guides	8 senior guides	3	They have direct contact with visitors and are the most important information providers in the study area. Hence, visitor management and sustainable tourism is a concern for them.
7 Transport service providers	1 association	1	The association provides boat transport service for tourists traveling to Zegie Peninsula and maintains direct contact with visitors and locals in the study area.
8 Souvenir shop owners	1 association	1	Souvenir shops under the association provide various products to tourists. Hence, they are direct stakeholders in the tourism sector.
9 Visitors	N/A	26	15 international and 11 domestic visitors were involved as they are the actors of the tourism system
10 Total	50 +	50	

*N/A = not available.

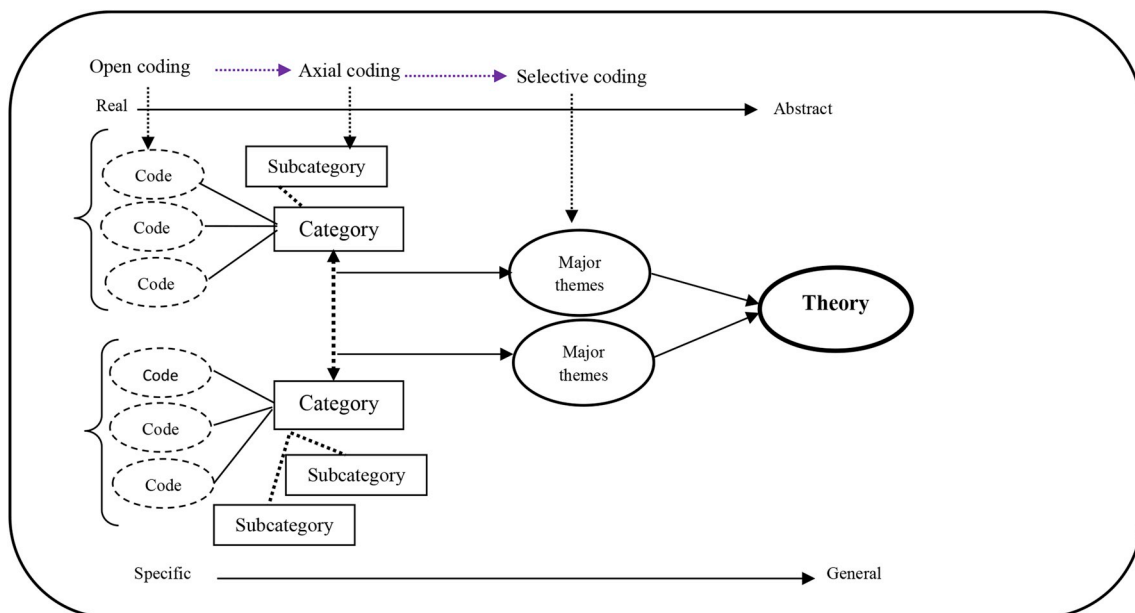


Fig. 5. Data coding process and stages of inductive analysis.



Fig. 6. Conservation and intensive use zones.

interviews 26 conveniently selected visitors of Zegie Peninsula, which makes the total study participants become 50. In qualitative studies, it is common that data are based on one to 30 informants (Fridlund & Hildingh, 2000). However, the sample size should be determined based on information needed so that research questions can be addressed adequately (Krippendorff, 2004; Patton, 2002). According to Charmaz (2014) and Mason (2010), customarily the concept of theoretical saturation is followed to determine the final number of participants. In the current study too, researchers came to understand that the collection of further data cease to bring new information to explain the research problem indicating the cutting point of data collection (Mason, 2010). Interviews took 55 min on average and were conducted both in English and Amharic. With the aim to maintain consistency, researchers themselves executed all the data collection, translation, and transcription.

3.4. Data analysis

Researchers employ inductive content analysis to thoroughly examine gathered data (Janesick, 2000; Kothari, 2004). QDA Miner qualitative data analysis software, version 5.0.20 assists data analysis in terms of coding, organizing, filtering, categorizing, relating and eventually abstracting concepts. The software allows making comparisons among different concepts simultaneously, which simplifies qualitative

data analysis and immensely improves the accuracy of research findings. Critical strategies, including method triangulation (in-depth interview vis-à-vis observation), confirmability audit and member checks are applied to ensure trustworthiness of research findings (Decrop, 1999; Kreuger & Neuman, 2006; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Cleaned and polished data were subjected to open coding, axial coding and selective coding respectively (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015; Merriam, 2009) to reach abstraction (see Fig. 5). Researchers identify lower level key concepts by employing open coding, categorize similar concepts using axial coding and link and integrate related categories through selective coding to reach to the final major themes (Merriam, 2009; Pandit, 1996).

4. Results and discussions

The concept of visitor management has two main connotations. On the one hand, it highlights the need to focus on improving visitor experiences and shaping their attitudes. On the other hand, it reflects the need to protect the natural and socio-cultural environment from destruction. Because of that, visitor management rests at the heart of sustainable tourism development encompassing various activities as part and parcel of destination management (Garrod et al., 2006; Swarbrooke & Page, 2012). Visitor management tools play a significant role to ease tensions between tourism resources and visitors' need



Fig. 7. The honey pot, Zegie Peninsula Monasteries.

(Leask, 2010). As participants of the current study persistently underlined, proper planning and implementation of visitor management tools lead to a high quality natural and cultural environment (Albrecht, 2017; Guilarte & González, 2018). Hard visitor management tools such as zoning, carrying capacity, visitor dispersion, waste management, access control and price alteration in connection with sustainable tourism are examined in the current study. Furthermore, information dissemination and interpretation as soft visitor management tools along with their role in shaping visitors' behavior and practices of stakeholders in managing visitors' behavior in tourist destination are explored. Eventually, issues that are currently overlooked in Zegie Peninsula, but are supposed to be used as visitor management tools are discussed.

4.1. Hard visitor management tools

4.1.1. Zoning

Zoning refers to the practice of assigning land units for a specific use (Geneletti & van Duren, 2008). As 75% of the respondents expressed, zoning has been practiced in Zegie Peninsula. Its level of implementation is considered good with conservation zone and intensive use zones (see Fig. 6). Conservation zone is delimited to exclusively conserve habitats within the natural dense forest. Visitors can pass through this zone in few numbers with guided tours. This zone is also frequented by visitors with specific purposes such as research and education. Moreover, the area is designated into a core zone, where strict nature conservation is enforced and intensive use zone, where steadily more intensive visitor presence and activities are permissible (Geneletti & van Duren, 2008; Xu et al., 2016). In the intensive use zones, facilities such as toilets, souvenir, information service, and local food and beverage products are available for visitors (Swarbrooke & Page, 2012).

The following quote is what a visitor perceived about the current practice of zoning in Zegie Peninsula especially in the monasteries' vicinity:

Visitors in the area have different interests and tastes. The effort of Zegie Monasteries in separating areas into clusters help visitors to easily follow and explore heritage attractions. It also allows visitors to get services on the intensive use zone areas and visit attractions in conservation zones. However, there are also some areas that are not easily accessible in the cluster requiring further works (International visitor, March 2018).

This reinforces what Manono and Rotich (2013) discussed in relation to the importance of segregating tourist attraction sites into different zones according to the resources they possess. Meanwhile synchronizing the interest of visitors is essential to find the right balance between resource conservation and use (Kuo, 2017).

4.1.2. Carrying capacity practices

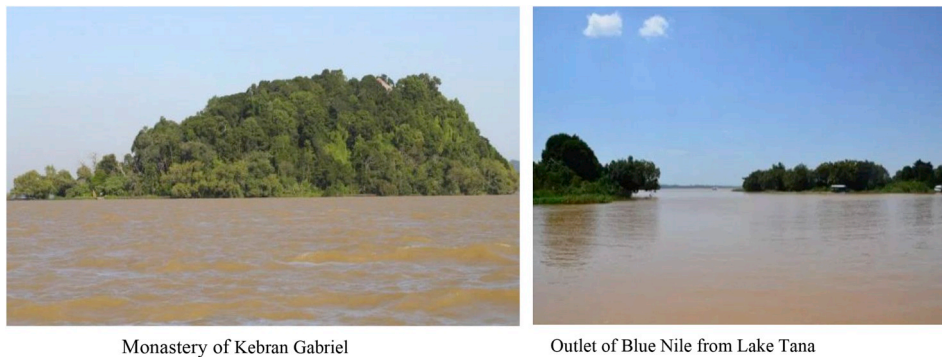
Carrying capacity is a concept that has been widely employed in the tourism and hospitality sector (Kennell, 2016). According to Swarbrooke and Page (2012), carrying capacity refers to the maximum number of people that can be effectively accommodated before unacceptable damage begins to take place in a destination. Hence, carrying capacity in Zegie Peninsula is examined in relation to the physical, environmental, economic and socio-cultural pillars. Findings reveal that the implementation of carrying capacity is successful in terms of environmental and socio-cultural facades while the economic pillar was found to be ineffective since it marginalizes local communities. This might be in part due to the current low tourist flow to the area and limited community engagement (Asmare, 2016; Wondirad, 2017; Yitbarek, Tadie, Timer, & Fischer, 2013). After critical observations, the following dimensions of carrying capacity concepts are found to be imperative to pay attention in Zegie Peninsula.

- Carrying capacity practices underline ecological components (biological aspects have gotten rigorous attention in the study area).
- Visitor experiences (possible interactions among visitors in the study area is practiced in line with the interest of the local communities and visitors).
- The interaction between the local people and visitors in the area contributes towards the conservation of cultural heritage.
- The economic component of carrying capacity lacks adequacy and fairness in providing supplementary income for local communities residing in Zegie Peninsula.

Findings also reveal that the concept of carrying capacity is not implemented in quantifiable and comparable numeric values. However, theoretical aspects which are suited to the biological and physical elements are taken into consideration reinforcing the findings of Tselentis, Prokopiou and Toanoglou (2012) who substantiated that the implementation of carrying capacity should not necessarily be constrained by mathematical equations just to have a fixed number of visitors. With respect to the current carrying capacity practices in Zegie Peninsula, an expert opinion reads that:

In Zegie Peninsula the notion of carrying capacity is implemented to manage visitors in line with their interest. For instance, those who came to the area for a religious purpose are identified and grouped together and then escorted to main church areas. They are also escorted to the museums found in the area. Visitors interested in nature-based attractions are guided to the natural attractions of the Peninsula. Depending on the season of the year the number of visitors included within a group varies (Tour guide, March 2018).

However, given the development phase of Zegie Peninsula as a tourist destination, currently carrying capacity is not yet a grave concern (Butler, 1980). However, critical consideration of the issue of



Monastery of Kebran Gabriel

Outlet of Blue Nile from Lake Tana

Fig. 8. Potential areas of visitor dispersion in Zegie Peninsula.

carrying capacity is essential to prevent the advent of such a problem in the later stages of the destination's life cycle.

4.1.3. Visitor dispersion

To utilize resources effectively and reduce crowdedness in time and space, visitor dispersion has been also practiced along with zoning and carrying capacity in Zegie Peninsula. Accordingly, visitors are dispersed into different parts of the Peninsula as the majority of research participants (85%) averred (see Fig. 7 and Fig. 8). As one type of hard visitor management tools, visitor dispersion helps to ensure better planning of tourism activities leading to a good balance between resource conservation and tourism use (Andrie, Hodor, Musat, & Hertanu, 2009; Leung et al., 2018). Nevertheless, it is also reported that due to lack of adequate paved roads, the use of visitor dispersion as a visitor management tool is constrained.

4.1.4. Practices of price discrimination

Protected areas often attract visitors to generate revenue by collecting entrance fees (Donázar, Ceballos & Avizanda, 2018) and the provision of various services (Yitbarek et al., 2013). If it is cunningly designed and implemented, price discrimination can also help to regulate and manage visitors' flow (Börner, Mburu, Guthiga, & Wambua, 2009; Swarbrooke & Page, 2012). With respect to price, visitors in Zegie Peninsula believe that both entrance fees, and price of other available goods and services, such as transportation and guiding services, plus gift items, are affordable with no clear price discrimination among visitors. The price of public transportation, entrance fee, and guide fees are determined by the local government in the area. Therefore, it is possible to say that currently price discrimination is not implemented in Zegie Peninsula as a visitor management technique perhaps due to that fact that the local government wants to attract more visitors into the area. However, there is a difference between domestic and international tourists in terms of entrance fees to attractions, which is a common practice in most developing nations (Alpizar, 2005). Nevertheless, in the context of Zegie Peninsula the purpose of the price difference has no relation with visitor management apart from collecting more revenue.

4.2. Soft visitor management tools

4.2.1. Interpretation and information dissemination tools

As part of an instructive process, interpretation involves the transfer and dissemination of accurate destination information to paint a picture and cultivate values onto the minds of visitors about environmental, socio-cultural, political and economic conditions of a destination (Frost, 2001; Mason, 2005b). Research findings indicate that information dissemination and interpretation tools such as magazines, newspaper, leaflets, guidebooks, brochures, signboards and maps are not sufficiently utilized in Zegie Peninsula currently. For visitors who want further information about attractions found in the Peninsula such as Zegie Monasteries, it is difficult to get details from written sources.

Such a limitation affects the sustainable development of Zegie Peninsula in two ways. On the one hand, it reduces the marketability of its heritage resources and on the other hand, it compromises the practical operationalization of visitor management due to the scarcity of information. It also ruins visitors' revisit intention and positive commentaries about the destination. In a similar manner, Pranav and Paul (2011) highlighted that if the availability and quality of information and interpretation are poor in a tourist destination, visitors will face a shortage of information, which significantly degrades their travel experience. As far as the status of information and interpretation tools in Zegie Peninsula is concerned, an expert from the government tourism institution addressed that:

Thus far, the study area has the limitation of providing adequate information in different alternatives such as the internet, newspapers, magazines, brochures and local and international media including social media using different languages. These are substantial information tools that can convey relevant information to visitors prior to their arrival and during their actual visit. Since tools of information dissemination alternatives are in shortage, visitors in the study area face a lack of detailed and rich information about the destination (Local tourism department officer, January 2018).

However, one positive development participants pointed out is the status of signage found in Zegie Peninsula Monasteries. Different signs are located clearly so that visitors can see and read (see Fig. 9). Nevertheless, these signages still fail to provide brief background descriptions of attractions. The proper use of signage in protected areas and around main roads enables destinations to provide various information that includes direction, distance, important landmarks, and sites of local services among others (Mitchell, 2010).

Respondents mentioned that in Zegie Peninsula Monasteries properly designed posters are displayed conveying detailed information (see Fig. 10). This reinforces what Hughes and Morrison (2005) discussed in their study that the values of environmental interpretation tools such as posters as a common tool of natural area management strategies. Posters are also able to provide figurative information to visitors resulting in better understanding (Hassanli, 2017; Hughes & Morrison, 2005; Lee & Thapa, 2017). Subsequently, these good practices need to be further reinforced and consistently practiced to ensure the proper flow of information thereby better visitor management.

4.3. Missing elements in the current visitor management efforts of Zegie Peninsula

As findings vividly show, there is inadequate use of soft visitor management techniques. This study unfolds that so far there is no use and application of technology such as digital displays and multi-lingual customized interpretation equipment to assist visitor management in Zegie Peninsula. According to UNWTO (2018a) press release, the application of technology and innovation, including ICT in destination

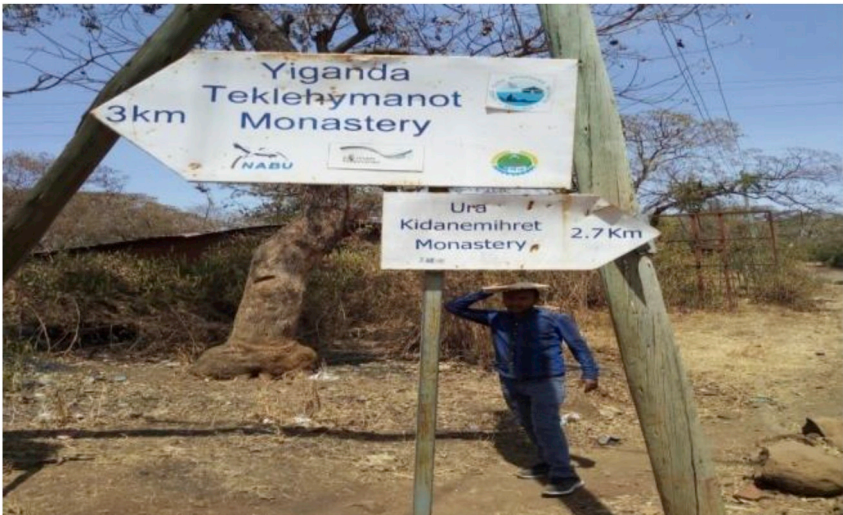


Fig. 9. Sample signage in the study area.



Fig. 10. Sample posters that show the religious features of the study area.

interpretation improves the quality of the tourist experience significantly. The use of modern information technology in protected areas supports visitor management and improves tourism services (Leung

et al., 2018). Destinations also become more engaging both to residents and tourists, by integrating tangible and intangible resources that are more interactive through digital technology (Marques & Borba, 2017).



Fig. 11. Litter bin unavailable.

Moreover, Zegie Peninsula experiences different shortcomings discussed in Section 4.4, which reduce visitor experiences and affect the sustainable development of tourism.

4.4. Constraints of sustainable destination development in Zegie Peninsula

4.4.1. Lack of effective waste management

Although practices related to zoning, visitor dispersion and carrying capacity are appreciable, poor waste management discernibly affects environmental quality in Zegie Peninsula and thereby visitor experience. The vast majority of research participants (90%) underscored that currently, the waste management practice in Zegie Peninsula is very poor affecting tourists' stay in the area on top of diminishing visitor experience and tarnishing the image of the destination. Problems such as lack of adequate and clean public toilets and the absence of garbage bins on main roads, the absence of waste sorting and recycling practices are mentioned by respondents as serious concerns in relation to waste management.

As the researchers personally observed in the study area (see Fig. 11), litter bins were not properly placed in all parts of important landmarks in the Peninsula causing problems for visitors in the disposal of their garbage such as plastic bottles, tissues, and other disposable objects. A similar problem is pointed out by Shamshiry et al. (2011) in Langkawi Island, Malaysia and by Gebrekiros (2016) in Axum, Ethiopia where environmental pollution occurs due to inappropriate waste management practices.

4.4.2. Limited visitors' movement within the Peninsula

Zegie Peninsula with its ancient monasteries rich in history and pristine ecosystem is a prominent tourism corridor in Amhara National Regional State (Alelign et al., 2007; ANRSCTB, 2017). Respondents who represent visitors perceived that the current flow of visitors, especially within Zegie Monasteries, is restricted, which hampers their free movement thereby dwindling their travel experience. Participants from Zegie Monasteries, however, reported that given these monasteries are places of ancient sacred heritage, reflecting antique religious values of the Christian community, they do not promote a free flow of tourists. On top of that, threats of vandalism and theft are a concern as monastery authorities highlighted. Museum authorities in the monasteries also require strict enforcement of the values and codes of the monasteries to avoid intrusion and loss of religious essence of the destination. Tourist movement within Zegie Peninsula is also restricted due to poor infrastructural development. Roads in the area are unpaved and it is, therefore, difficult to walk from one part of the peninsula to another, especially for elderly visitors. Such a problem leads to shorter tourist stay affecting transactions between hosts and guests. Concerned stakeholders should work in close collaboration to overcome this challenge and take advantage of existing tourism opportunities by developing the required tourist infrastructure in line with the triple-bottom-line concept (Worboys, 2015). Periodic road maintenance keeping authenticity and originality is also needed (UNWTO, 2018b; Wang & Gnoth, 2016).

4.5. Key stakeholders in visitor management

Visitor management involves a wide range of stakeholders (Alazaizh & Hallo, 2017; Albrecht, 2017; Leung et al., 2018; Mason, 2005a; Mason, 2005b; UNWTO, 2018b). In fact, the effective implementation of various visitor management tools depends on active participation of these actors. The roles of stakeholders such as tour guides, hotel employees, communities and destination management organizations are vital in this respect (Getz & Timur, 2012; Leung et al., 2018; Manyara & Ndivo, 2016). Considering that, the current study examines the role of different stakeholders in visitor management in Zegie Peninsula as the following sections discuss.

4.5.1. Local communities in visitor management

According to key informant interviewees at the regional tourism bureau, the government remains dedicated to involve local communities in visitor management related activities and is vigilant of its importance to ensure a longer-term tourism development. Such a move helps visitors to obtain authentic guiding services and food and beverage supplies from local communities which, in turn, supports local communities economically through generating additional income (Graci, 2013; Mitchell & Ashley, 2010). Moreover, even though inadequate, local government provides community support through facilitating credit access and providing technical advice. Consequently, currently, some community members in Zegie Peninsula engage themselves in the tourism development by supplying food and beverage products in addition to providing guiding services. Some members of the community also own souvenir shops and the management of those ancient monasteries found in the Peninsula belongs exclusively to members of the local community who have religious expertise. These are some of the appreciated moves so far in Zegie Peninsula that should be further solidified to guarantee effective visitor management and thereby strengthen sustainable tourism development (Leung et al., 2018; Thochom, 2014; UNWTO, 2018b). In that respect, a private sector representative (tour operators) underlined that:

Whenever communities participated in tourism and in the visitor management process, they tend to develop a positive attitude to the sector and towards visitors. That helps in the implementation of planned visitor management tools. In that regard, Zegie Peninsula communities started to develop a sense of belongingness and stewardship due to their gradual involvement in the sector (Tour operators' representative, March 2018).

This reconfirms the statement issued by the UNWTO (2017), which highlighted the crucial role of communities in promoting, interpreting and explaining their culture and other destination attributes to visitors in addition to developing a sense of belongingness. However, given the community is diverse in its nature where every member of the community has unique narratives and stories to tell, which, in turn, enriches visitor experience, enforcing grassroots community participation is paramount (Tessema et al., 2010; Wondirad, 2017). In this respect, scholars suggested that active community engagement leads to a successful, healthy, and sustainable tourism development by eliminating community resentment and boosting broad-based support (Liu et al., 2014; Lo et al., 2018; Mbaiwa, 2015b; Tessema et al., 2010; UNWTO, 2017). To that end, communities also need to organize themselves to defend external exploitation and consolidate their bargaining power and control over resources. In line with this, other tourism stakeholders, especially the government and the private sector should unlock opportunities and provide support to local communities (Snyman, 2016; Wondirad, 2017; Yitbarek et al., 2013). As the current scenario portrays, in Zegie Peninsula grassroots community engagement is limited unlike the principle of triple-bottom-line advocates (Elkington, 1998) underlining the need for the proper implementation of the triple-bottom-line concept.

4.5.2. Other relevant stakeholders' roles

Zegie Peninsula is a destination where a wide range of stakeholders including, the government, monastery authorities, local communities, tour operating companies, visitors and transport providers interact regularly. Every stakeholder contributes in one or another way to the sustainable development of the area in relation to visitor management. Monastery authorities and tour operating companies as well as local community members, who work as a local guide, play a significant role in visitor management through awareness creation and raising (Candrea & Ispas, 2009; UNWTO, 2018b). As it can be seen in Fig. 12, tour guides inform visitors what to do and not to do in the destination in addition to placing garbage bins in convenient places to protect environmental littering (Sandaruwani & Gnanapala, 2016; Zafer & Yavuz,



Fig. 12. Garbage bins made of local materials and donated by local tour guides.

2016).

On top of creating job opportunities and generating additional income, souvenir shops (see Fig. 13) also play an instrumental role in promoting a destination and disseminating information (Moscardo, 2017). As such, gift shops have a crucial impact in supporting visitor management efforts as participants stated and literature asserts (Moscardo, 2017; Swanson & Timothy, 2012). The government, on the other hand, plays an influential role in destination visitor management through introducing and enforcing regulations and providing funds for visitor management activities (Albrecht, 2017; Pearce, 2017; Zelenka & Kaceti, 2013). However, in the case of Zegie Peninsula, it was pointed out that the support both from the local and regional government has never been enough as the following excerpt from a community representative highlights:

Given tourism is a new venture in our area, it is quite problematic to fully understand the sector and take advantage of the opportunities it brings. In addition to lack of understanding, we have other constraints that impede our meaningful engagement in tourism business including lack of tourism business skill, communication gap, and financial bottlenecks to enter into the sector. In this regard, the support from the local and regional government remains inadequate (Community representative, February 2018).

Tour operators based in the Capital city that send visitors along with their tour guide and tour leader are also frequently blamed by most of the research participants (90%) for both entirely neglecting and/or cutting down tourist visit period in Zegie Peninsula. Participants suggested that proper follow-ups and corrective measures from the government side should be taken to resolve this challenge. In this regard, both the local and regional governments are found to be again weaker in drafting and enforcing regulations to avoid misconducts of federal tour operators as the following quote from a tourism expert demonstrates:

Even if Zegie Peninsula is open for both independent and group travelers, tour operators, and travel agents often either neglect or keep the visit time short. Because of this, community engagement in tourism-related activities is limited currently. It also negatively affects visitor experience due to an unnecessary rush. That also resulted in a strained relationship between federal tour operators and local tour guides (Public institution representative, April 2018).

This confirms the findings of Tahiri and Kovaci (2017) which discussed the significance of the government's role in looking after tourism business operators participating in service provision. Travel agents and tour operators should also focus on rendering quality tour services in line with destinations' environmental, socio-cultural and economic



Fig. 13. A souvenir shop found in Bahir Dar, a gateway to Zegie Peninsula.

Table 3
Summary of major themes extracted from qualitative data.

Current practices and applicability of hard visitor management tools
— Zoning is one of the hard visitor management tools currently in use. — Conservation zone is delimited to preserve sensitive and fragile natural habitats. — Intensive use zones are also allocated to deliver services within the study area. — Carrying capacity in the study area is practiced considering ecological and socio-cultural elements. — Visitor dispersion activities reduce congestions in a limited space. — Visitors' movement is affected by poor road quality in the Peninsula. — The study area faces challenges of satisfying the needs of multiple group arrivals due to poor infrastructure and limited facilities. — Entrance and guide fees and other fees are found to be reasonable. — Poor waste management remains a challenge.
Applicability of soft visitor management techniques/information and interpretation tools
— There is a growing trend of the use of signage and posters as information display tools, but mainly in a local language and limited description. — Stakeholders such as tour guides, monastery administrators and local communities have a positive attitude towards visitors and are always ready to help. — Written information tools like newspaper, magazines, brochures, leaflets, guidebooks, and maps were not readily available to visitors. — There is the absence of the use of technological applications to assist destination interpretation, and visitor management efforts.
The extent of stakeholder participation in visitor management and sustainable tourism
— Few local communities, tour guides, and monastery administration employees participate in visitor management activities. — The emphasis of tour operators and travel agencies is to attract more foreign visitors and to maximize profit overlooking domestic tourism and sustainability issues. They also pay little attention to the satisfaction of their customers. — Broad-based community participation is yet to be achieved. — Government is blamed for poor institutional efficiency and low attention towards sustainable tourism development in Zegie Peninsula. — Local transport providers contributed to visitor management by informing visitors. — The traditional mode of transportations such as horses and mules are not abundantly available for visitors.
The nexus between visitor management and sustainable tourism development
— The role of properly implementing visitor management tools in facilitating environmental, economic, and socio-cultural dimensions of sustainable tourism is pointed out. — Retaining authenticity and keeping originality appeared as one of the central themes in exercising visitor management tools. — Collaboration among various relevant tourism stakeholders is suggested to ensure effective implementation of visitor management plans. — Even though visitor management tools are practiced, the principles of triple-bottom-line are not yet fully achieved.

desires instead of just collecting revenue (Snyman, 2016). In fact, local government and tour operators should also act as a bridge between communities and visitors and to create a direct contact (Wondirad, 2017). Local transport providers are among the pertinent stakeholders in Zegie peninsula that play significant roles in the destination's visitor management effort. According to the views of the local transport providers association representative, in addition to providing transport services, they offer essential information to visitors such as where to dine, shop, refresh, and about the code of ethics given Zegie Peninsula is a religious site. Above all, it should be noted that the bottom-line of introducing proper visitor management techniques in places of scared heritage resources fragile in nature such as Zegie Peninsula is to develop a tourism sector, which is environmentally sustainable, socio-culturally responsible and economically viable instead of maximizing profit at the expense of community values and the ecosystem (Buckley, 2003b; Hoole, 2010; Laine, 2010).

5. Conclusion and implications

The current study explores the roles that visitor management can play in driving sustainable tourism destination development in a developing country context. Findings unfold that the practice of hard visitor management tools such as zoning, carrying capacity, signage, and interpretation contribute to environmental conservation and

thereby sustainable tourism development through regulating visitor flow and providing information (see Table 3). Visitors indicated that zoning practices enabled them to obtain and experience local souvenirs, transportation services, churches, and other attractions and facilities conveniently. Pertaining to the implementation of carrying capacity, a domestic visitor pointed out that carrying capacity practices should be implemented to provide protection to natural resources such as wildlife and aquatic ecosystem and to secure socio-economic benefits in the long run. Moreover, socio-cultural elements including local traditions and religious practices need to be also respected while determining carrying capacity. In fact, carrying capacity is not a serious issue currently in Zegie Peninsula because of the stage of its tourism development (Butler, 1980; Ferreira & Harmse, 1999).

Visitor dispersion is found to be useful despite impeding factors such as seasonality and inconvenient road access. Study findings suggest a visible correlation between the proper implementation of visitor management tools and sustainable tourism development in heritage sites of sacred places like Zegie Peninsula (Leung et al., 2018; Ling, 2002; Mason, 2005b; Swarbrooke & Page, 2012; Zelenka & Kacetl, 2013). The existence of environmental information and interpretation tools provide basic information about the available cultural and natural attractions. Soft visitor management tools (information dissemination and interpretation tools) such as brochures, newspaper, magazines, leaflets, posters, and maps need to be carefully designed in different languages and should be easily available to inform tourists and promote the destination (Hiippalla, 2013).

Placed at the heart of destination management, visitor management interventions enormously shape visitor experiences. Hence, given Zegie Peninsula is a blend of both ancient natural and cultural heritage resources, ensuring the highest level of protection and conservation calls for a cohesive cooperation and equitable participation of all tourism stakeholders to efficiently apply relevant visitor management strategies. As far as stakeholders' participation in visitor management and sustainable tourism development is concerned, the involvement of local communities and monastery staff appears to be significant in promoting environmental and socio-cultural conservation practices and satisfying visitors' interest. Local communities tend to show a positive attitude towards tourists and towards the tourism sector when they do participate and share benefits from tourism (Chuang, 2010; Lee, 2013; Lo et al., 2018; Tessema et al., 2010). In this respect, in contrast to the core principles of triple-bottom-line, the participation of local communities in Zegie Peninsula is not yet adequate. Instead, communities are vulnerable to manipulation and marginalization from other actors such as the private sector and the government itself.

Consistent and appropriate implementation of visitor management tools along with persistent follow-up and inspection is also needed as part of the visitor management strategy to make sure that all waste disposal stations, roads, and access points are in a good shape. Therefore, collaboration among tourism stakeholders in the study area is urgent to secure a pristine ecosystem for sustainable tourism. About stakeholders' role in waste management, a visitor having an experience in the study area outlined that upon arrival all visitors must be informed about how and where to dispose of waste within the study area. Thus, tour guides, monastery staff, and local communities need to offer basic information about waste management. Putting enough number of litter bins on appropriate spots can be one way of reducing this challenge.

Pertaining to visitor management and environmental, economic and socio-cultural aspects of tourism development, special care should be given to sustainability frameworks. Therefore, marketing efforts need to be carried out cautiously since what matters in fragile sacred heritage destinations like Zegie Peninsula is maintaining uniqueness and authenticity and thereby increasing the economic returns of tourism with minimal detrimental impacts. In that respect, strictly adhering to the triple-bottom-line principles is paramount. Furthermore, communities dwelling in Zegie Peninsula should organize themselves and form a

strong alliance to increase their bargaining power, to defend their common interest, and to bring other tourism stakeholders to the negotiating platform so that issues such as equity and fairness can be thoroughly and transparently discussed and resolved. Capacity building schemes pertinent to communities need to be enforced (e.g. providing hospitality training and facilitating financial access) to boost communities' involvement through small-scale tourism business startups. Finally, as key tourism stakeholder, the private sector should look beyond fulfilling short-term economic gains and start to play its indispensable role for the longer-term sustainable development of tourism through steadfast collaboration and partnership (Snyman, 2016).

Findings of the current study reflect substantive theoretical and managerial implications for tourism stakeholders of emerging destinations. On the one hand, it reasserts and offers insights about the critical role of visitor management as a key ingredient both in facilitating a sustainable tourist destination and enhancing visitor experience. On the other hand, it underscores the implications of community engagement in soft visitor management strategies to ensure a longer-term tourism destination development. Subsequently, the current study advances our critical understanding of the relationship among successful visitor management implementation and community involvement as well as sustainable tourism destination development. From the practical point of view, outcomes might be of interest to relevant stakeholders of the tourism sector in developing destinations to duly consider the principles of triple-bottom-line in the overall planning and development of a tourist destination. That, in turn, helps the tourism sector to make a substantial contribution to the economic, environmental and socio-cultural improvement of a tourist destination.

6. Limitations and future research directions

The current study focuses only on visitor management practices in relation to sustainable destination development in the context of an ancient sacred heritage site. As such, it has a scope limitation. Moreover, this research takes place in a setting of unique governance approach, political system, and socio-cultural norms, and values. As a result, findings might not be strictly applicable to other dissimilar contexts. Regarding the sampling technique, the current study recruited participants purposively due to the nature of the research approach adopted, which in turn, might affect the representativeness of data gathered to a certain extent. Nevertheless, maximum care has also been taken throughout the research to constrain researchers' bias. Moreover, strategies of ensuring trustworthiness of qualitative data were carefully operated. In fact, given the aim of a qualitative study is to gain an in-depth understanding of the research problem instead of drawing generalization, high representativeness could not be expected per se. Future research shall examine the effectiveness of visitor management practices in tourist destinations through employing quantitative or mixed research approach to spearhead the most appropriate types of visitor management techniques in sacred heritage sites using a coefficient of indicators. Furthermore, conducting a comparative study between community managed and government-run heritage sites might offer a better insight regarding proper visitor destination development and management models to successfully unleash sustainable tourism development in a developing country setting.

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