Stakeholder Challenges Impeding Attainment of Blue Flag Status at Eastern Beach in East London, South Africa

Ntuthuzelo Headman Sayedwa

Department of Applied Management, School of Public and Operations Management, University of South Africa, Pretoria, Email, 63561557@mylife.unisa.ac.za
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6325-9747

Dorothy Ruth Queiros*

Department of Applied Management, School of Public and Operations Management, University of South Africa, Pretoria, Email, queirdr@unisa.ac.za
http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6988-5818

*Corresponding Author

Abstract

This research explores the challenges faced by public and private stakeholders at Eastern Beach in East London, that are preventing attainment of Blue Flag status. Blue Flag beaches are a major tourism drawcard, yet the Eastern Cape province of South Africa is facing obstacles that impede achievement of this ecolabel. To investigate this, the paper focuses on Eastern beach. Twenty public and private stakeholders involved in coastal planning and management in East London participated in individual virtual semi-structured interviews. Through thematic analysis, key themes were identified. Findings indicate that public control, safety and security as well as infrastructure are key challenges. Environmental management also requires attention as several negative impacts prevail. Furthermore, the need for concerted stakeholder coordination in the drive toward Blue Flag status emerged as a necessity. Considering the potential of Eastern Beach, it would be favourable to East London to have this beach accredited. It would enhance sustainable tourism development with its positive economic, social and environmental impacts. The identification of the challenges can assist stakeholders in moving towards this status. These findings could also apply to managers at other beaches that are aiming to attain, maintain or regain Blue Flag accreditation.

Keywords: Beach tourism; Blue Flag; public and private stakeholders; sustainable tourism development; tourism impacts

Introduction

The tourism industry is internationally renowned as a capable driver of growth in emerging economies (Khan, et al., 2021; United Nations World Tourism Organisation, 2021). Existing research proves that in most developing nations, this growth is widely supported by governments, along with farming, energy development and capital (Akinboade & Braimoh, 2010; Khan et al., 2021). The World Travel and Tourism Council (2021) confirms that the tourism industry is one of the world's major economic sectors, due to it being the third-largest export category (after fuels and chemicals). In the year 2019, it reported seven percent of global trade respectively (World Bank, 2019). For some countries, it can represent over 20% of their Gross Domestic Product and, overall, it is the third largest export sector of the global economy (United Nations World Tourism Organisation, 2021). It is also one of the sectors most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, impacting economies, livelihoods, public services and opportunities on all continents (Dube, 2021; United Nations World Tourism Organisation, 2021).

Within tourism, the sustainability agenda is a key pillar that continues to minimise negative impacts and promote tourism's multiplier effects (Gössling et al., 2020; Nhamo et al., 2020). Sustainable tourism development has gained prominence due to its capability to generate employment, increase foreign exchange earnings and positively impact the balance of payments (World Commission on Environment & Development, 1987). Tourism activities should achieve harmony and balance in addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities (Guo et al., 2019; Pivcevic et al., 2020; World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987).

One of the means of achieving and monitoring this are internationally recognised ecolabels (Sucheran & Arulappan, 2020). The Worldwide Ecolabel Index for 2014 indicates that over 430 ecolabels are documented, with 128 of these applying to the tourism industry (Arulappan, 2016; Ecolabel Index, 2016). The Blue Flag ecolabel is world-renowned for beaches, marinas and sustainable boating and is trusted by millions around the globe (United Nations World Tourism Organisation, 2021). It began along the French coastline of Europe in the 1980s as an environmental brand to enhance beach management for leisure and to boost tourism (Foundation for Environmental Education, 2019). This ecolabel plays two important roles – to guide the tourism industry to improve its performance by supporting operational guidelines; and to communicate to beach users the beaches that meet the set environmental, educational, safety and accessibility criteria (United Nations World Tourism Organisation, 2019; Wildlife & Environment Society of South Africa, 2021).

Today, the Blue Flag programme is a recognised tool for sustainable tourism development at coastal tourist destinations (Pencarelli et al., 2016; Veiga et al., 2018) and is widely used in many developing and developed countries (Lucrezi et al., 2016). It responds to the principles of environmental law (Coetzee, 2016; Klein & Dodds, 2017; World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987), has the potential to mitigate negative coastal environmental impacts (Geldenhuys & Van Der Merwe, 2014; Slatter & Mearns, 2018) and manages and protects the ecological environment (Klein & Dodds, 2017; Pencarelli et al., 2016). Apart from the environmental benefits, the Blue Flag ecolabel also contributes to social and economic sustainability (Veiga et al., 2018). On the social side, it delivers valued recreational coastal spaces (Francesco et al., 2020; Klein & Dodds, 2017) and is a drawcard for international visitors (United Nations World Tourism Organisation, 2021). The award also provides positive benefits to the local population – enjoyment (Department of Environmental Affairs, 2014; Miller, 2016); tourism governance; environmental education; enhanced visitor management and the protection of cultural resources (Veiga et al., 2018). On the economic side, the Blue Flag label is internationally appreciated as a major contributor to beach tourism and local and national economies (Lucrezi & Van Der Merwe, 2015).

South Africa adopted the Blue Flag programme in 2001 to ensure that accredited beaches could be promoted for their sustainable management and international standards of cleanliness, safety and environmental responsiveness (Blue Flag South Africa, 2020; Francesco et al., 2020; National Department of Tourism, 2016) and to benefit from the economic spin-offs (Lucrezi & Van der Merwe, 2014). As of 2021, 51 beaches across the provinces of the Western Cape, Eastern Cape and KwaZulu Natal have been accredited with Blue Flag status (Wildlife & Environment Society of South Africa, 2021).

The Eastern Cape, however, contains only seven of these (Business Tech, 2021; Wildlife & Environment Society of South Africa, 2021), in spite of beach tourism being a strong component of the province's economic growth, drawing domestic and international tourists (Klein & Dodds, 2017). The province's coastline is rich with biodiversity and beautiful beaches such as Eastern Beach in East London, which currently does not have Blue Flag status. This beach is the city's most central, popular and beautiful beach, with large waves (popular

with surfers) and black rocks scattered along the south coastline (Bank, 2015; ShowMe East London, 2021b). The warm Indian Ocean and sub-tropical weather enables visitors to swim all year round (Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality, 2019). This shoreline is home to 10 000 beach users annually and includes changing rooms, restaurants and take-away food options (Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality, 2021; East London Travel Guide, 2022). During the festive period, this beach receives over 100 000 beach users (Eastern Cape Socio Economic Consultative Council, 2017).

In spite of this popularity, for Eastern Beach, the benefits associated with the status are, at present, missed opportunities from an economic, social and environmental perspective. After 26 years of freedom since the apartheid regime ended in 1994, the results of sustainable tourism development and Blue Flag award programme still show exclusion, with fragmented environmental legislation and policies that have not successfully promoted tourism in several coastal areas, including the Eastern Cape (Acheampong, 2015; Booyens, 2007). The key challenge for the Eastern Cape Province has been the inconsistent implementation of sustainable tourism development strategies by destination managers (Operation Phakisa, 2014; Tichaawa & Samhere, 2015). The province hosts East London city, which still suffers from past historical infrastructure backlogs that persist and exacerbate stress in coastal and natural tourist resources (Buffalo City Metropolitan Development Agency, 2016 & Cousins, 2011). Inadequate tourism development and management practises for East London city are leading to numerous and negative ecological impacts and degradation at Eastern Beach (Arcus Gibb Engineering & Science, 2010; Operation Phakisa, 2014), which demotivates tourists and visitors, creates discontentment among the hosts and could destroy its tourism potential (Operation Phakisa, 2014; Tichaawa & Samhere, 2015).

In this context, little research exists on the challenges faced by beach management in South Africa (Silwana, 2015). More specifically, limited empirical research has been conducted to understand the main obstacles faced by stakeholders involved in the management of Eastern Beach, who wish to attain Blue Flag status. This research therefore aims to determine the challenges faced by public and private stakeholders at Eastern Beach in East London, that prevent the achievement of this status.

Literature review
Sustainable tourism in a global context
The study of tourism continues to be fuelled by its impacts (Sucheran & Arulappan, 2020; World Travel Tourism Organisation, 2021). Prior to COVID-19, the growth of travel and tourism continued to outperform that of the world-wide economy for the ninth consecutive year (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2021). International arrivals that reached 1.5 billion in 2019 are forecast to reach 1.8 billion by 2030 (World Bank, 2019). It is vital that this growth is sustainable and inclusive, and that it contributes positively to the communities, natural ecosystems and cultural heritage upon which the tourism sector depends (World Bank 2019; World Travel & Tourism Council, 2021). Sustainability is not a new notion, it has been an agenda for administrations, non-governmental organisations and private stakeholders over the past three decades, while sustainable tourism expansion has been a focus for half of this period (Veiga et al., 2018). Globally, ecological awareness and concern for the environment has grown rapidly since 1995, resulting in considerable research being conducted on sustainable tourism development and the mitigation of negative tourism-related impacts (Department of Environmental Affairs, 2014; Du Plessis, 2005). The concept of sustainable tourism development recognises the interdependency between economic growth, social equity and environmental integrity (Department of Environmental Affairs, 2014; Goffi et al., 2019; World

Commission on Environment & Development, 1987) and is helping the tourism industry to operationalise practical sustainability goals (Guo, 2019.).

In 2015, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were framed for the next 15 years, and of these years, less than nine remain in which to achieve these goals. The 2030 Agenda for SDGs includes 17 goals and 169 targets (United Nations, 2018) whereby member states aim to ensure sustained and inclusive economic development, social inclusion and environmental protection (Elder et al., 2017; United Nations, 2018). This agenda is striving to prevent poverty, reduce inequality, promote inclusive economic growth with decent work for all, create sustainable cities, address climate change and promote multi-stakeholder partnerships (Elder et al., 2017).

Sustainable tourism and stakeholders in the South African context

In South Africa, through the Tourism White Paper of 1996, sustainable tourism development is a key means to strengthen the country's tourism sector (Department of Environmental Affairs & Tourism, 1996). Since then, the country has implemented tourism policies to improve sustainable tourism (Coetzee, 2016; National Department of Tourism, 2016). South Africa additionally introduced the National Environmental Management Act (NEMA) 107 of 1998, as well as the Integrated Coastal Management Act (ICMA) 24 of 2008 to supplement the White Paper agenda (South Africa, 2016). Furthermore, the integrated environmental management (IEM) agenda in South Africa encourages tourist destinations to emphasise the impacts of human activities on coastal or marine resources (Department of Environmental Affairs & Tourism, 2017). The National Development Plan 2030 presents sustainability as human wellbeing, where the natural and cultural environment are conserved for future generations (South Africa, 2016). Ferreira & Perks (2016) who developed a sustainable tourism framework for South Africa echo this, stating that management involvement should not only be a response to coastal environmental challenges but should extend to the recognition of the economic and social value brought by coastal zones and the initiation of coastal zone management and policy processes.

To achieve sustainability on the South African coastline, the multidisciplinary tourism sector should incorporate a wide variety of destination stakeholders in areas of planning, development and management (Department of Environmental Affairs & Tourism, 2017). Depending on the focus, these could include private sector, government, local communities, non-governmental organisations, the media and tourism industry employees (South Africa, 2016). Reed (2008: 2417), looking at stakeholder participation for environmental management, states that "there is evidence that stakeholder participation can enhance the quality of environmental decisions by considering more comprehensive information inputs". This present research draws on the first two steps of stakeholder analysis, which are to identify the issue/define the natural and/or social system impacted by certain actions and identify individuals who can influence (affect) the problem (Reed et al., 2009). In line with Freeman's (1984) work on stakeholder theory, this research views the participants as stakeholders who can affect an organisations activity. Their participation is sought to determine the most prevalent issues placing stress on Eastern Beach. Reed (2008: 2417) refers to this as passive consultation, where stakeholders provide information that the researchers can then analyse. At a later stage, this information can lead to more informed and legitimate environmental decision making (Sharpe et al., 2021).

Blue Flag: An ecological win for South African beaches

The Blue Flag programme is a well-established means for stakeholders to achieve sustainable tourism development on the coastline. Yet, Duglio and Beltramo (2016: 2), theorise that

awareness regarding the Blue Flag award programme is generally limited in most developing countries, like South Africa. This is in spite of the fact that South Africa is the primary country outside of Europe to be approved for Blue Flag accreditation (Wildlife & Environment Society of South Africa, 2022).

The award and management process of the Blue Flag programme in South Africa is executed through partnership between the Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa, the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA), the National Department of Tourism and participating coastal municipalities (with their public and private stakeholders) (Blue Flag South Africa, 2020; National Department of Tourism, 2016; Slatter & Mearns, 2018). The Blue Flag programme requires beaches to meet 33 criteria, grouped under environmental education and information; water quality; environmental management; and safety and services (Blue Flag South Africa, 2020; Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa, 2021). It is vital that beach management or municipal representatives ensure that the water quality aligns with internationally recognised standards (McKenna et al., 2011) and with the Blue Flag necessities regarding the microbiological parameter Escherichia coli (faecal coli bacteria) and intestinal enterococci (streptococci) (Foundation for Environmental Education, 2006). The Blue Flag award is given to all beaches that pass the criteria for a specific season (which officially opens on 1 December annually). Post the award, beaches must continue to comply with the standards set (McKenna, et al., 2011; Silwana, 2015) or risk losing this status. The Blue Flag Beach status assures local and overseas visitors of quality – that these beaches comply with internationally approved standards of safety and other acceptable user policies and regulations (Klein & Dodds, 2017; National Department of Tourism, 2019; Silwana, 2015; Slatter & Mearns, 2018).

It is important for coastal municipalities to have sufficient funds for this voluntary ecolabel, as it is an expensive and lengthy process (Ariza et al., 2008; McKenna et al., 2011). Once the 33 mandatory criteria have been met and verified by the Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa (WESSA), the Blue Flag application process can start. There are five steps, namely completion of the application form by beach management stakeholders; submission of the application to WESSA; new applications receiving a site inspection by WESSA; the application being sent to the National Jury for application; and recommendations from the National Jury being sent to the International Jury for a final decision. Once approved, the site/beach is awarded the Blue Flag status (Wildlife & Environment Society of South Africa, 2022). The award holds for the South African bathing season (November to April). During this time the flag must fly (Blue Flag South Africa, 2020) and monitoring must continue to ensure ongoing compliance (McKenna et al., 2011; Silwana, 2015). Failure to comply results in temporary or permanent withdrawal of the award (Blue Flag South Africa, 2020). While South Africa's Blue Flag beaches do increase the attractiveness and standing of South Africa as a destination (Blue Flag South Africa, 2020; Slatter & Mearns, 2018), since the award is moderately new in the country, it may take more time for tourists and locals to perceive the value of the award and its associated improvement in beach quality (Nahman & Rigby, 2008).

Research site: Eastern Beach

This empirical research focuses on Eastern Beach in East London (Figure 1). East London is a city on the southeast coast of South Africa, located in the Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality (BCMM) of the Eastern Cape Province. This city has a population of over 267 000 and covers an area of 168,86 km² (Buffalo City Metropolitan Development Agency, 2016). BCMM is the local tourism district of East London (Ebomah et al., 2019).
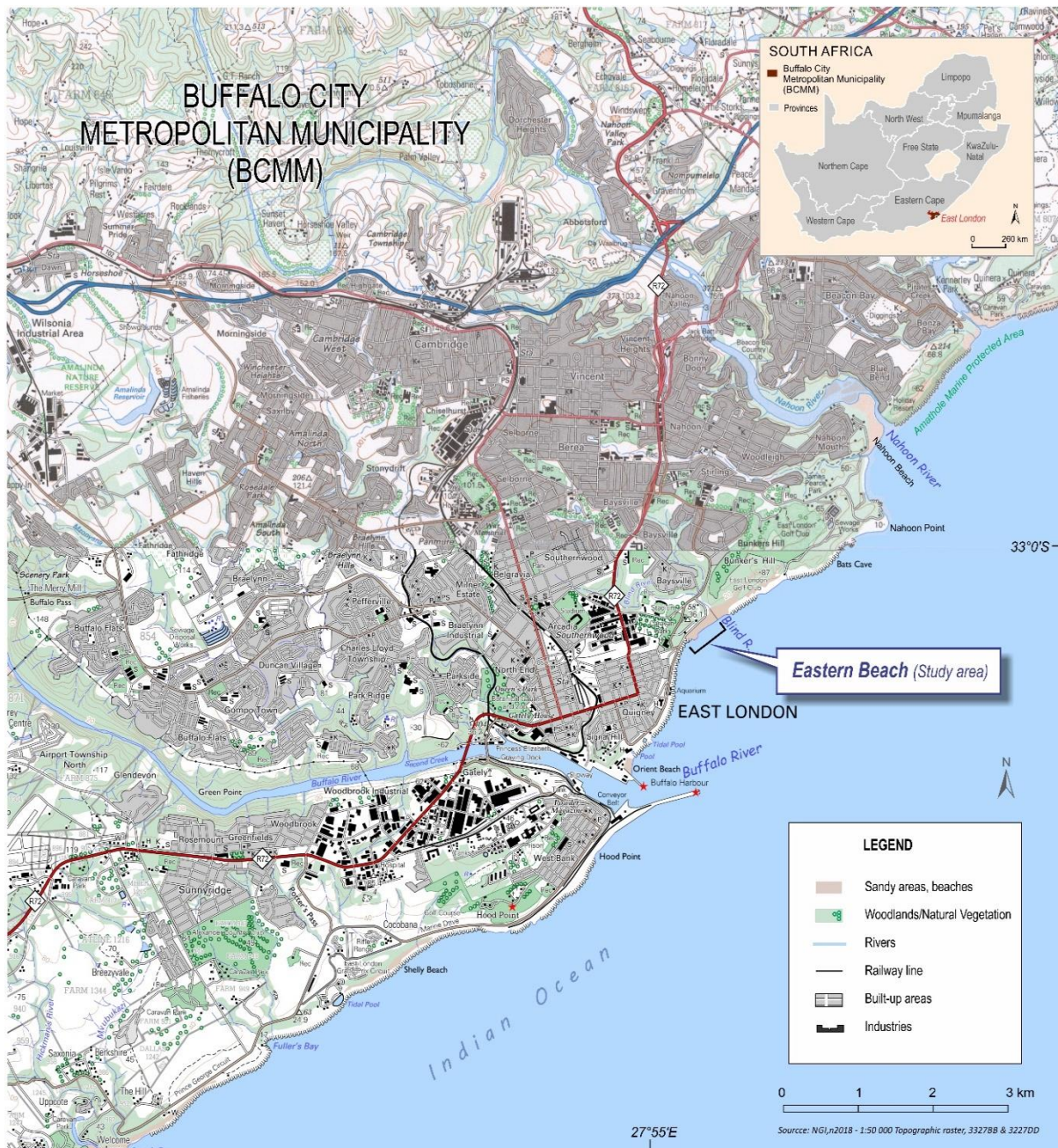
Figure 1: Location of Eastern Beach within East London (East London Travel Guide, 2018).

Figure 2 illustrates an aerial view of Eastern Beach, Ebuhlanti/Marina Glen Public Park and Esplanade Precinct in East London. The three locations are in walking distance of each other and are referred to as the 'Golden Triangle' of East London. Altogether, they offer an attractive environment, where residents, tourists and visitors can spend leisure time (ShowMe East London, 2021a).
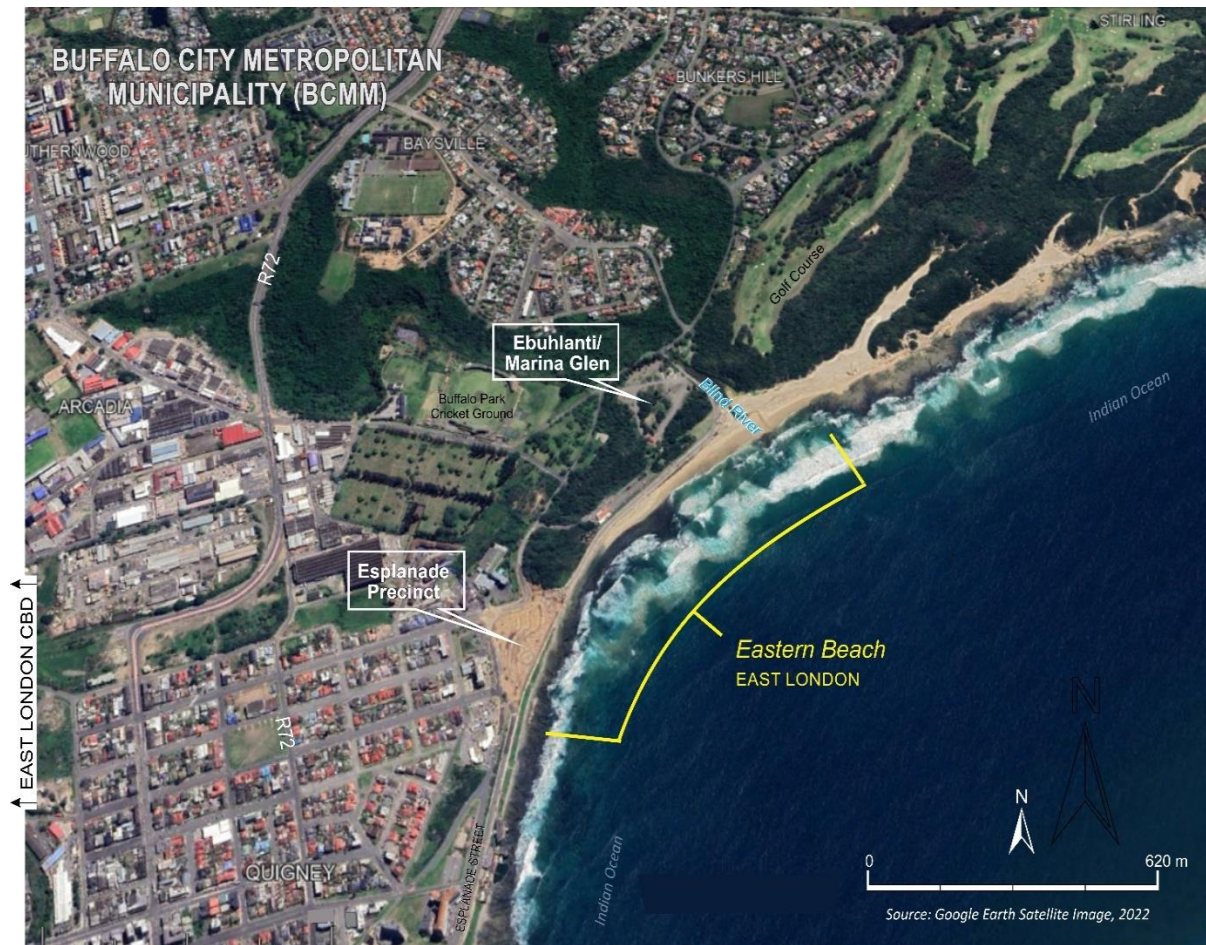
Figure 2: The Golden Triangle of East London (Eastern Beach, Ebuhlanti/Marina Glen Public Park and Esplanade Precinct) (ShowMe East London, 2021a).

Eastern Beach is one of the major local tourist attractions in the city and offers pleasant bathing with its warm-water currents (Hastings & Wilbanks, 2019). Beach management has not applied for Blue Flag status in over ten years. Moreover, there are no Blue Flag beaches in East London. The inadequate conditions of non-Blue Flag award beaches, including Eastern Beach, call for urgent focus on sustainable coastal development in that area (Du Preez et al., 2011; Silwana, 2015). In terms of identifying the issue plaguing the natural and social systems of Eastern Beach (as per stakeholder analysis), the increasing intensity of negative impacts on this beach weakens it as a tourist attraction. There is an urgent need for long-term management planning, developmental strategies and management practices as guided by the constitution (Eastern Cape Socio Economic Consultative Council, 2017). At present there are plans to upgrade parts of the beachfront (Sayedwa & Queiros, 2021; ShowMe East London, 2021a). The Ebuhlanti/Marina Glen Public Park is being proposed for rezoning to mixed land use, such as business premises, residential accommodation and offices. A further area (Court Crescent), is planned to be rezoned for recreational use, including skateboarding, relaxation space and an outdoor amphitheatre, gym, maze and play area (ShowMe East London, 2021a).

Research design and methodology
Stakeholder selection
The participants were public and private stakeholder groups, who hold management roles within their organisations. These participants are directly involved in tourism planning, coastal development and the environmental management of coastal tourist attractions in East London.

The population of active tourism stakeholders in East London is 52, both private and public combined (Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality, 2018). A purposive sampling technique was used to find and select stakeholders that were knowledgeable on the challenges surrounding Eastern Beach and who held positions where they could ultimately affect the outcome (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Freeman, 1984; Reed et al., 2009). Using this sampling technique enhanced the validity and reliability of the information gathered (Palys, 2008). The inclusion criteria were that participants needed to be between the ages of 18 and 65 and be employed as a public or private tourism stakeholder in East London. The final sample consisted of twenty participants (ten public stakeholders and ten private stakeholders). Anonymity of participants was assured and informed consent signed prior to each interview. Before fieldwork commenced, ethical clearance was obtained from the Department of Applied Management Research Ethics Review Committee at the University of South Africa.

Research instrument

This empirical research was predominantly qualitative, involving virtual semi-structured interviews, based on an interview guide. The questions were developed by the primary researcher and informed by literature. Through this method, new knowledge was discovered and participants' views were recorded and captured in an open-ended manner (Creswell, 2009). However, where deemed necessary, a few quantitative questions were included.

The use of semi-structured interviews as a data collection method derived from the philosophy that public and private tourism stakeholders' perspectives were noteworthy, beneficial, comprehensible and that they could positively affect this research, by producing rich and detailed data (Mason, 2002). Microsoft Teams was used due to the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated restrictions. Sedgwick and Spiers (2009) emphasise virtual semi-structured interviewing as the most viable, reliable and cost-effective alternative to face-to-face in-depth interviewing, to overcome geographical barriers and time constraints. Each interview was recorded with the participant's consent.

Data analysis

To organise and manage data for analysis, Atlas.ti, version 9.0.18 was used. The recorded interviews were transcribed into word documents and then coded as per the themes identified. The different themes and sub-themes are substantiated through the use of direct quotations from participants. Each participant received a number, which is used to denote their quotes, for example P1 refers to Participant 1. Due to the ethics requirements of the University of South Africa, participants cannot be identified. The primary researcher also performed data cleaning and determined what explanations arose from the data analysis and whether they could be triangulated with other data.

Results

This section focuses on the findings regarding the challenges relevant to stakeholders and Eastern Beach, that hinder the attainment of Blue Flag status. This is followed by a discussion on these findings.

Challenges faced by stakeholders involved in Eastern Beach

Regarding challenges faced by stakeholders, a qualitative question was posed to participants, namely: "What do you think are the challenges or problems faced by the public and private stakeholders involved in Eastern Beach?" Table 1 depicts the findings for the theme of 'Stakeholder challenges at Eastern beach', presenting the sub-themes and their frequencies (number of quotes coded with each sub-theme). The sub-theme, 'Public control issues',

contained the highest number of quotes, followed by 'Safety and security issues' and then 'Insufficient beach management'.

Table 1: Theme: Stakeholder challenges at Eastern Beach

Stakeholder challenges at Eastern Beach	
Sub-themes	Public and private stakeholders
Public control issues	11
Safety and security issues	8
Insufficient beach management	7
Lack of ablution facilities	6
Insufficient waste bins	5
Sewage management	3
TOTAL	40

Challenges relevant to Eastern Beach

The following findings emanate from a quantitative question, where several challenges were listed, and participants were asked which of these were relevant to Eastern Beach. These challenges were derived from two sources, namely guidelines from the Foundation for Environmental Education and Blue Flag criteria. These were rephrased as possible challenges, which could result in drawbacks towards attaining Blue Flag status. Stakeholders' responses are portrayed in Table 2.

Table 2. Challenges relevant to Eastern Beach

Challenges relevant to Eastern Beach	Response frequency (n = 20)	
	Applicable	Not applicable
Lack of coordination of requests for applying for Blue Flag award for Eastern Beach	16	4
Lack of monitoring of bathing water quality to ensure Blue Flag Beach quality compliance	18	2
No organised litter collection and acceptable forms of litter disposal	12	8
Absence of organised collection of waste for recycling	7	13
Lack of organised collection of hazardous wastes for appropriate disposal	12	8
Absence of assurance that the standards concerning safety provisions are met	17	3
Lack of regular environmental education activities for beach users at Eastern Beach	20	0
Insufficient maintenance of the beach, so that it does not look good for beach users	20	0
Lack of Information boards for visitors on protecting the environment, safety precautions and services	17	3
Inadequate incorporation of environmental considerations into local planning for the Eastern Beach	20	0

Discussion
Challenges faced by stakeholders involved in Eastern Beach
Table 1 depicts the findings for the theme of 'Stakeholder challenges at Eastern beach'. In this section, the sub-themes are presented and substantiated by verbatim quotations.

Public control issues
This sub-theme contained 11 quotations. Participants elaborated on public control issues as a major challenge facing stakeholders at Eastern Beach. The results signify that the management of people at the beach is a major issue ["… the management of people is the biggest issue" (P3); "My belief is that there's not sufficient oversight and control, which is challenging now" (P13); "… there is no crowd control at all" (P18); and "… it needs control from the municipality in terms of ensuring that people do what is acceptable at the beach" (P21)].

One participant touched on this lack of control, but linked it to limits of acceptable change, "… I think that lack of control there can be linked to … limits of acceptable change" (P5). Overcrowding emerged as one of the current challenges at this beach, with one participant

conferring that "The challenge faced by public stakeholders is too much overcrowding, and people are allowed to be there any time" (P9) and "There is no control on the number of people that's allowed in the space, so sometimes it's totally overcrowded" (P3). The results illustrate that alcohol usage is a challenge that can be dangerous: "Alcohol on the beach becomes a problem … and especially when you've got little kids and it's very dangerous for the little ones" (P17) and "... because there's uncontrolled drinking, and subsequently, quite a number of criminal actions emanate from the drunkenness" (P3). One participant touched on the lack of environmental consciousness – "there is no awareness care for the environment on keeping it a clean place" (P13). Keyser (2009), in her work on developing tourism in South Africa also found that challenges arising are mostly due to demand-led activities, which can be negative, environmentally unfriendly and unsustainable (Keyser, 2009). A Coastal Awareness Programme was launched in 2018 to improve environmental consciousness and reduce undesirable alcohol usage amongst visitors to Eastern Beach (Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality, 2018; Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, 2018). However, the findings of this current research reveal that these problems continue.

Safety and security issues
The sub-theme, 'safety and security issues' was the second most prominent, with eight quotations. Participants voiced that crime is a challenge faced by stakeholders at Eastern Beach, for example:

> "My challenge is crime. …. Many people wouldn't really feel safe around Eastern Beach" (P15).
> "… it has got a problem of crime; it is not safe to walk out there at night" (P21).
> "There's an element of crime, you know, it's not visibly policed" (P18).
> "I think it's quite a high-risk area, in fact there's been a number of incidents there in the past with people having been accosted and robbed …" (P7).

Initiatives are underway to try to improve safety, for example, as part of the Safer Festive Season operations, the South African Police Service currently assist to improve safety and security for visitors, including during busy weekends (South African Police Services, 2017). The Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (2018) also confirm the presence of patrols by members of law enforcement at Eastern Beach.

Others made reference to insufficient life guards for the safety of beach users: "The lifesaving services are not even sufficient, even if it's there, because there's not enough guards as compared to the number of users" (P3); "… there are not lifeguards present all year round, a lot of people are not obeying the rules and drinking on the beach" (P18); and "I'm sure they have lifeguards, but generally when there are big crowds, there is insufficient safety controls" (P13).

Insufficient beach management
Participants expressed the challenge of insufficient beach management, with this sub-theme recording seven quotations. One participant alluded to insufficient capacity to manage the beach, for example, "… one of the public sector challenges, I think will be capacity and resources to manage this beach facility" (P4), while another touched on the lack of effort from the municipality: "I think one of the challenges they face is lack of a concerted effort from the side of the municipality to manage Eastern Beach …" (P6). Problems faced by Eastern Beach were linked to the Ebuhlanti area (see Figure 2), for example: "The challenge will be the entertainment area of Ebuhlanti and how that is controlled" (P4); and "Another big problem is

that you shouldn't have anyone drinking on the beach and it is because of the park nearby, they end up at sea drunk …" (P8). Vandalism of facilities emerged as another challenge faced by stakeholders, with one participant asserting that, "… there is definite issue of vandalism … so they keep stripping the facilities and that is an ongoing struggle" (P17). Existing evidence indicates that more effort to minimise these challenges is made during the festive period, through the South African Police Service (SAPS) Joint Operations Centre that includes disaster management, law enforcement, traffic, fire, police, lifesaving, ambulance services and the National Sea Rescue Institute (Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality, 2019).

Lack of ablution facilities
'Lack of ablution facilities is the fourth sub-theme, with six quotations. The results illustrate that ablution facilities are a challenge, for example: "… I think the lack of ablution facilities is the main one" (P5); "So the challenge there is that there isn't enough ablutions and not enough maintenance from the city" (P7); "… facilities need a serious revamp, especially the ablutions, including the life guards shack …" (P8); "… my stakeholder challenge would be facilities such as change rooms and toilets" (P15); "It would be facilities, proper ablution facilities that are clean …" (P16); and "… insufficient ablution facilities" (P18).

Insufficient waste bins
The results from participants revealed 'Insufficient waste bins' as the sub-theme with the fifth highest number of quotes (5). Quotes to illustrate this challenge follow:

> "…facilities for waste control and management are a problem, although there are public bins, right, they are not sufficient" (P3).
> "… littering and waste management because … if you want to throw away rubbish and you miss one rubbish bin, you struggle to find another one. So, there is insufficient waste or rubbish bins around the beach" (P15).
> "… because there's a lot of broken glass and litter on the ground, bins are limited, so that just makes the environment unsafe and dirty" (P18).
> "I think the key challenge is waste, not sure if dust bins are enough but that is the main issue for me, the area is polluted" (P6).

Sewage management
A further aspect of participants' understanding of current challenges faced by stakeholders at Eastern Beach was encapsulated by the sub-theme, 'Sewage management' and recorded three quotations. The results illustrate that sewage is a challenge and participants synthesised that this beach is affected by sewage discharge ["… sewerage is an issue, so water and its hygiene is also a problem due to that river there with sewage flowing down to the sea from Nahoon, so that would definitely be the first issue" (P17); "… the sewerage spillage on the river that runs into the ocean" (P15); and "Elevation of the sewerage problem is their challenge" (P7)]. These results concur with Momba et al. (2006), who arrived at a similar conclusion regarding the sewage challenge at Eastern Beach.

Challenges relevant to Eastern Beach
The challenges listed in Table 2 were then grouped into themes and discussed as follows.

Lack of coordinated requests for Blue Flag status
The high number of participants (16/20) who indicated that the lack of coordination of requests to apply for Blue Flag status is applicable, shows this to be a prevalent challenge. Stakeholders

need a more coordinated approach in order to comply with Blue Flag criteria. The Foundation for Environmental Education (2019), which is responsible for setting the Blue Flag criteria, encourages participating stakeholders to have a coordinated approach and to continue working on the mandatory criteria for Blue Flag status.

Lack of monitoring of bathing water
The lack of monitoring of bathing water relates to the water quality problem, which prevents beaches from obtaining the status, or causing those with the status to lose it. Concerning this beach, 18 out of 20 participants indicated a lack of compliance in this regard, since water quality is not monitored. Previous research confirms that there is a lack of quality water treatment within BCMM (Momba et al., 2006; Water Research Commission, 1999). This issue also emerged in a previous sub-theme, namely sewage management, where participants referred to the polluted river flowing into the ocean.

Environmental management and planning challenges
Most participants indicated existing challenges pertaining to lack of organised litter collection (12/20) and lack of organised collection of hazardous wastes for appropriate disposal (12/20). This relates to the sub-theme discussed earlier of insufficient waste bins. The problem of litter, compounded by too few dustbins as well as lack of organised litter collection, is significant. It is noteworthy that all participants (20/20) specified that the inadequate incorporation of environmental considerations into local planning, is an applicable challenge at Eastern Beach. In relation to Eastern Beach and criterion 15 and 17 of the environmental management criteria for Blue Flag status, compliance is only achieved in terms of organised collection of waste for recycling, since 13 out of 20 participants indicated that this challenge was not applicable. These results correspond with the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (2018), which confirms that environmental management issues exist at Eastern Beach. They have driven the inauguration of the ad hoc coastal awareness programmes at this beach, aimed at addressing environmental management challenges, but this is not sufficient. The Department of Environmental Affairs' joint strategies with Working for the Coast projects and the public were held in 2018, to raise awareness regarding access to the coast, coastal public property and keeping this clean (Department of Environmental Affairs, 2019). It does appear that more needs to be done to ensure better environmental management and planning regarding Eastern Beach.

Environmental education and information challenges
The results indicate existing environmental education and information challenges. All participants exposed the lack of compliance concerning regular environmental education activities for beach users (20/20), while most (17/20) indicated a lack of information boards for visitors (on protecting the environment, safety precautions and services at Eastern Beach). It is noteworthy that all participants specified insufficient maintenance of the beach as a challenge, resulting in it being unattractive to beach users (20/20). Projects driven by the DEA are occasional and focus on public environmental awareness at Eastern Beach and Ebuhlanti and cleaning and rehabilitation of the coastal infrastructure (Department of Environmental Affairs, 2019). Other organisations voluntarily carry out cleaning campaigns to raise awareness regarding environmental education at Eastern Beach, such as the Border Kei Chamber Call To Action. The presence of information boards could mitigate the 'public control issues' and 'safety and security issues' identified earlier as sub-themes.

Beach safety standards are not met

The majority (17/20) of participants marked the 'Absence of assurance that the standards concerning safety provisions are met', as an applicable challenge for this beach. This finding can also be linked to the 'safety and security issues' sub-theme discussed earlier, where participants voiced concerns regarding crime and insufficient lifeguards.

Implications/conclusion

The aim of this research was to determine the challenges faced by public and private stakeholders at Eastern Beach in East London, that are preventing the attainment of Blue Flag status. It first highlighted several research problems involving Eastern Beach, namely negative impacts on the environment which have caused deterioration of the coastline; fragmented environmental legislation and policies that plague the Eastern Cape; and a dearth of research on stakeholder roles towards attaining Blue Flag status for East London's beaches. Through virtual semi-structured interviews, public and private stakeholders involved in the management of Eastern beach were questioned in an attempt to contribute to these research gaps. Via thematic analysis several findings emerged. The majority of participants voiced that visitor management is a challenge that stakeholders are facing at Eastern Beach. They specifically asserted that there is lack of control to manage people at this beach, which leads to another challenge, which is overcrowding. The results also reveal that alcohol usage is a challenge, which some participants noted endanger other beach users, especially children, and result in criminal activities. Participants further described safety and security as a current challenge, asserting that people do not feel safe to visit this beach at night. There is also lack of control on the part of people using the Ebuhlanti recreational grounds and then going to the beach/sea intoxicated. Participants alluded to incidents of robbery at the beach and referred to it as high-risk. Some asserted that safety is a challenge due to insufficient lifeguards. Beach management appeared as an issue faced by stakeholders. The results of this research have shown that the high number of participants (16/20) who indicated that the lack of coordination of requests to apply for the Blue Flag status is applicable, show this to be a very prevalent challenge. Stakeholders need a more coordinated approach to ensure Blue Flag criteria compliance. The Foundation for Environmental Education (2019), which is responsible for setting the Blue Flag criteria, encourages participating stakeholders to work together towards achieving the criteria. The results also indicate that there are insufficient resources relating to public security measures (i.e. security officers and lifeguards) and management of physical beach facilities (number of waste bins and use of waste-bins). More security is required to protect existing beach facilities from vandalism. In addition to insufficient resources, participants confirmed that there are limited efforts from the municipality to ensure that the management of this beach is improved. Sewage management received a specific mention as an issue concerning stakeholders, since the spillage leads to the sea.

This research has contributed to current knowledge regarding the challenges faced by public and private stakeholders at Eastern Beach. While the results of this research have confirmed that several negative impacts prevail on this coastline, the need for concerted combined effort by both public and private stakeholders to achieve Blue Flag status has also emerged. Future research could focus on step three of stakeholder analysis which is to involve in decision-making the stakeholders who could influence the problem (Reed et al, 2009). Stakeholders involved in Eastern Beach need to be brought together to pool resources and expertise, set clear objectives, make decisions and initiate action. The findings from the present research could assist in moving stakeholders towards better informed and legitimate environmental decision making (Sharpe et al., 2022), which will aid the move towards Blue Flag status. Achievement of even some of the criteria would help to overcome current

challenges and decrease non-compliance. Considering the potential of Eastern Beach, it would be favourable to East London to be able to boast having a Blue Flag beach, as it would enhance sustainable tourism development with its positive economic, social and environmental impacts. These findings could also apply to managers at other beaches that are aiming to attain, maintain or regain Blue Flag accreditation.

Acknowledgements

References

Acheampong, K. M. (2015). South Africa's Eastern Cape Province Tourism Space Economy: a System of Palimpsest. *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure,* 4 (1), 1-9.

Akinboade, O. A. & Braimoh, L. A. (2010). International Tourism and Economic Development in South Africa: A Granger Causality Test. *International Journal of Tourism Research,* 12 (2), 149-163.

Arcus Gibb Engineering and Science. (2010). *The Eastern Cape State of the Environment Report 2009. East London.* Eastern Cape Department of Economic Development and Environmental Affairs.

Ariza, E., Jimenez, J. A. & Sarda, R. (2008). A Critical Assessment of Beach Management on the Catalan Coast. *Ocean and Coastal Management,* 51 (2), 141-160.

Arulappan, L. B. (2016). *Environmental Impacts of Ecolabels on the Tourism Sector of South Africa*. Unpublished Master's Dissertation. Durban. Durban University of Technology.

Bank, L. (2015). Frontiers of Freedom: Race, Landscape and Nationalism in the Coastal Cultures of South Africa. *Anthropology Southern Africa,* 38 (3), 29-68.

Blue Flag South Africa. (2020). *About Blue Flag in South Africa*. Available at https://blueflag.org.za/index. [Retrieved February 13 2022].

Booyens, L. (2007). Societal Power Shifts and Changing Social Identities in South Africa. *Workplace Implications,* 2 (1), 1-20.

Buffalo City Metropolitan Development Agency. (2016). *Five-Year Strategic Plan – 2016/2021*. Available at https://www.buffalocity.gov.za/municipality/keydocs/fiveyear_strategic plan/phase3/TourismSupply.PDF. [Retrieved January 05 2022].

Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality. (2018). *Integrated Development Plan - 2018 to 2011*. East London, Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality.

Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality. (2019). B*uffalo City Metro Outlines its Festive Season Safety Plans*. Media Statement. Available at https://www.buffalocitymetro.gov.za/statement.php?id=29. [Retrieved February 16 2022].

BusinessTech. (2021). *The Safest, Cleanest Beaches in South Africa*. Available at https://businesstech.co.za/news/lifestyle/546766/51-of-the-safest-cleanest-beaches-in-south-africa/. [Retrieved February 02 2022].

Coetzee, J. H. (2016). *Sustainable Development in South African Environmental Law and its Relationship with the National Development Plan*. Unpublished Master's Dissertation, Environmental Law and Governance, North-West University.

Cousins, B. (2011). Contextualising the Controversies: Dilemmas of Communal Tenure Reform in Post-apartheid South Africa. In Claassens, A. & Cousins, B. (Eds). Land, Power and Custom. Controversies Generated by South Africa's Communal Land Rights Act. *Journal of African Law*, 54(2), 298-312.

Creswell, J. W. & Plano-Clark, V. L. (2011). *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*. (2nd Ed). Thousand Oaks, California. SAGE Publications.

Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism. (1996). *White Paper on Development and Promotion of Tourism*. Pretoria: Government Printers.

Department of Environmental Affairs. (2014). *Tourism Sector Recovery Plan – COVID19 Response*. Department of Environmental Affairs, Pretoria.

Department of Environmental Affairs. (2017). *Annual Report 2017/2018*. Available at https://www.deat.gov.zal/Documents/PreviousAnnuaIReports/2017Jan/annualreview. [Retrieved March 11 2022].

Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment. (2018). *Launch of Coastal Awareness Programme in East London*. Available at https://www.environment.gov.za/mediarelease/launchof_coastalawareness_programme2018#. [Retrieved March 11 2022].

Du Plessis, C. (2005). Action for Sustainability: Preparing an African Plan for Sustainable Building and Construction, *Building Research & Information,* 33 (5), 405-415.

Dube, K. (2021). Implications of COVID-19 Induced Lockdown on the South African Tourism Industry and Prospects for Recovery. *African Journal of Hospitality Tourism and Leisure,* 1 (10), 270-287.

Dube, K., Nhamo, G. & Chikodzi, D. (2020). COVID-19 Cripples Global Restaurant and Hospitality Industry. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 24 (11), 1-4.

Duglio, S. & Beltramo, R. (2016). Environmental Management and Sustainable Labels in the Ski Industry: A Critical Review. *Sustainability,* 8 (581), 1-13.

Eastern Cape Socio Economic Consultative Council. (2017). Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality – A Socio-Economic Review and Outlook. East London: Eastern Cape Socio Economic Consultative Council.

Font, X. (2002). Environmental Certification in Tourism and Hospitality. *Tourism Management,* 23 (3), 197-205.

Ebomah, K., Sibanda, T., Adefisoye, M., Nontongana, N., Nwodo, U. & Okoh, A. (2019). Evaluating Nahoon Beach and Canal Waters in Eastern Cape, South Africa: A Public Health Concern. *Journal of Environmental Studie*s, 28 (3), 1115-1125.

Ecolabel Index. (2016*). Ecolabel Index* (online). Available at: www.ecolabelindex.com. [Retrieved December 14 2021].

Elder, M., Bengtsson, M. & Akenji, L. (2017). Making SDG Implementation Easier: Thinking About Goals as Means. Winnipeg: International Institute for Sustainable Development. *Sustainability,* 8(9), 2-27.

East London Travel Guide. (2021). *East London Maps*. Available at http://soileiragusgonta.com/map-of-east-london/map-of-east-london-4-travelguide-accommodation-tourist-information/. [Retrieved December 09 2021].

Ferreira, D. & Perks. S. (2016). *A Sustainable Tourism Framework for South Africa: Addressing Key Tourism Concerns*. The 2016 International Academic Research Conference in London. London, 9-11 November.

Foundation for Environmental Education. (2006). *Awards For Improving the Coastal Environment: The Example of the Blue Flag*. Copenhagen SV Denmark. Scandiagade,

Francesco, M., Domenico, M. & Pierluigi. T. (2020). *Boosting the Blue Economy: The Case of Blue Flag Eco-label and its Impact on Tourism.* Conference Paper Trust, sustainability and local development*: XVII SIM Conference at Castellanza.*

Freeman, R. E. (1984). *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach.* Boston. Pitman.

Geldenhuys, L. L. & Van Der Merwe, P. (2014). The Impact of Blue Flag Status on Tourist Decision Making When Selecting a Beach. *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure*, 3 (2), 1-36.

Goffi, G., Cucculelli, M. & Masiero, L. (2019). Fostering Tourism Destination Competitiveness in Developing Countries: The Sole of sustainability. *Journal of Cleaning Production,* 209 (13), 101-115.

Gössling, S., Scott, D. & Hall, C. M. (2020). Pandemics, Tourism and Global Change: A Rapid Assessment of COVID-19. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 21(1), 1-20.

Guo, Y., Jiang, J. & Li, S. (2019). A Sustainable Tourism Policy Research Review. *Sustainability*, 11 (11), 1-16.

Keyser, H. (2009). *Developing Tourism in South Africa: Towards Competitive Destination.* (2nd Ed). Cape Town: Oxford University Press.

Khan, A., Sughra Bibi, S., Ardito Lorenzo, A., Lyu, J. & Babar, Z. U. (2021). Tourism and Development in Developing Economies: A Policy Implication Perspective. *Sustainability*, 12 (16), 2-21.

Klein, L. & Dodds, R. (2017). Blue Flag Beach Certification: An Environmental Management Tool or Tourism Promotional Tool? *Tourism Recreation Research*, 10 (3), 1-14.

Lucrezi, S. & Van der Merwe, P. (2015). Beachgoers' Awareness and Evaluation of Blue Flag Awards in South Africa. *Journal of Coastal Research,* 6 (2), 67-98.

Lucrezi, S., Saayman, M. & Van der Merwe, P. (2016). An Assessment Tool for Sandy Beaches: A Case Study for Integrating Beach Description, Human Dimension, and Economic Factors to Identify Priority Management Issues. *Ocean & Coastal Management*, 9 (4), 21-22.

Mason, J. (2002). *Qualitative Researching*. California, Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publication.

McKenna, J., Williams, A. T. & Cooper, J. A. G. (2011). Blue Flag or Red Herring: Do Beach Awards Encourage the Public to Visit Beaches? *Tourism Management,* 32 (3), 576-588.

Miller, J. (2016). *Promoting Sustainable Development in South Africa: Environmental Regulation in Support of Renewable Energy*. Unpublished Masters Dissertation. Cape Town: University of Western Cape.

Momba, M. N. B., Osode, O. N. & Sibewu, M. (2006). The Impact of Inadequate Wastewater Treatment on the Receiving Water Bodies – Case Study: Buffalo City and Nkokonbe Municipalities of the Eastern Cape Province. *Water Research Commission*, 32 (5), 10-43.

Nahman, A. & Rigby, D. (2008). Valuing Blue Flag Status and Estuarine Water Quality in Margate, South Africa. *South African Journal of Economics,* 76 (4), 721-737.

National Department of Tourism. (2016). *The National Development Plan: Vision for 2030; the National Development Plan 2030: Our future – make it work*. Available at http://www.gov.za/issues/national-development-plan-2030. [Retrieved July 24 2019].

Nhamo, G., Dube, K. & Chikodzi, D. (2020). Counting the Cost of COVID-19 on the Global Tourism Industry (1 Ed.). *Nature Switzerland AG: Springer International Publishing*. doi:10.1007/978-3-030-56231-1.

Operation Phakisa. (2014). *Oceans Economy: Coastal and Marine Tourism*. Available at https://www.operationOperation Phakisa.gov.za/Pages/Home.aspx. [Retrieved December 19 2021].

Palys, T. (2008). Purposive Sampling. In L. M. Given (Ed.) *The SAGE Encyclopaedia of Qualitative Research Methods*. Los Angeles. SAGE Publications.

Pencarelli, T., Splendiani, S. & Fraboni, C. (2016). Enhancement of the "Blue Flag" Eco-Label in Italy: An Empirical Analysis. *Anatolia,* 27 (3), 28–37.

Pivcevic, S., Petric, L. & Mandi, A. (2020). Sustainability of Tourism Development in the Mediterranean—Interregional Similarities and Differences. *Sustainability*, 12 (18), 1-17.

Reed, M. S. (2008). Stakeholder Participation for Environmental Management: A Literature Review. *Biological Conservation*, 141 (1), 2417-2431.

Reed, M. S., Graves, A., Dandy, N., Posthumus, H., Hubacek, K., Morris, J., Prell, C., Quinn, C. H. & Stringer, L. C. (2009). Who's in and Why? A Typology of Stakeholder Analysis Methods for Natural Resource Management. *Journal of Environmental Management*, 90 (1), 1933-1949.

Sayedwa, H. & Queiros, D. (2021). *Towards Blue Flag Status: Current Conservation-Related Plans and Recommendations for Eastern Beach in East London, South Africa, by Public and Private Stakeholders*. Proceedings of the 5th International Conference on Events. Cape Town, South Africa, 16-18 November.

Sedgwick, M. & Spiers J. (2009). The Use of Videoconferencing as a Medium for the Qualitative Interview. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 8 (1), 1-11.

Sharp, L. M., Harwell, M. C. & Jackson, C. A. (2021). Integrated Stakeholder Prioritization Criteria for Environmental Management. *Journal of Environmental Management*, 282 (1), 1-19.

ShowMe East London. (2021a). *Exciting new Precinct Plans for the East London Beachfront*. Available at https://showme.co.za/east-london/tourism/exciting-new-precinct-plans-for-the-east-london-beachfront/. [Retrieved March 11 2022].

ShowMe East London. (2021b). *A History of East London*. Available at https://showme.co.za/east-london/tourism/a-history-of-east-london/. [Retrieved March 11 2022].

Silwana, H. L. S. (2015). *Blue Flag Beaches in the Eastern Cape: Implications for Tourism, the Environment and Socio-economy* (Masters Dissertation). East London, South Africa: University of Fort Hare.

Slatter, R. & Mearns, K. (2018). Perceptions and Activity Profiles of Blue Flag Beach Users in South Africa. *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure*, 7 (4), 1-15.

South Africa. (2016). *The National Development Plan 2030: Our future – Make it Work*. Available at https://www.gov.za/issues/national-development-plan-2030. [Retrieved December 9 2021].

South African Police Service. (2017). *Buffalo City Measures Over Festive Season*. Available at https://twitter.com/sapoliceservice/status/945614269743353857. [Retrieved March 14 2022].

Sucheran, R. & Arulappan, L. (2020). Eco-Labels in the Tourism Sector in South Africa: Benefits and Barriers. *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure*, 9 (6), 979-996.

Tichaawa, T. M. & Samhere, S. (2015). Responsible Tourism: Analysing Implementation and Challenges in East London Using the Stakeholder Approach. *African Journal for Physical, Health Education, Recreation and Dance*, 21 (2), 404-415.

United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO). (2019). *International Tourism Highlights.* Available at https://www.e-unwto.org/doi/pdf/10.18111/9789284421152. [Retrieved September 08 2021].

United Nations World Tourism Organisation. (2021). *Tourism and COVID-19 – Unprecedented Economic Impacts.* Available at https://www.unwto.org/tourism-and-COVID-19-unprecedented-economic-impacts. [Retrieved March 25 2022].

United Nations. (2018). *The 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals: An Opportunity for Latin America and the Caribbean*. Santiago: United Nations Publication.

Veiga, C., Santos, M. C., Águas, P. & Santos, J. A. C. (2018). Sustainability as a Key Driver to Address Challenges. *Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes,* 10 (4), 662-673.

Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa. (2021). *Blue Flag programme - What we do*. Available at https://www.wessa.org. [Retrieved April 09 2022].

World Bank. (2019). *International Tourism Receipts*. Available at https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/ST.INT.RCPT.CD. [Retrieved February 08 2022].

World Commission on Environment and Development. (1987). *Our Common Future*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

World Travel and Tourism Council. (2021).*Sustainable Growth.* Available at https://wttc.org/Initiatives/Sustainable-Growth. [Retrieved December 08 2021].