

FASIL GHEBBI, ETHIOPIA: A MODEL FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM AND HERITAGE CONSERVATION

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Abstract: *Fasil Ghebbi, a UNESCO World Heritage Site in Ethiopia, faces both opportunities and challenges in managing visitor flows to ensure sustainable tourism development. This paper examines the practices and challenges associated with implementing visitor management strategies in Fasil Ghebbi. By analyzing existing literature and empirical data, it sheds light on the complexities of managing tourism in heritage sites and proposes solutions to enhance sustainability. Through a comprehensive exploration of visitor management practices and associated challenges, this paper provides valuable insights for policymakers, stakeholders, and practitioners seeking to promote sustainable tourism in Fasil Ghebbi and similar destinations.*

Keywords: *Visitor management, Sustainable tourism development, Fasil Ghebbi, Ethiopia, Heritage sites.*

INTRODUCTION

International tourist arrivals grew above 6% in the first half of 2018 and are expected to be greater in 2017 (UNWTO, 2018). Africa as a continent also received about 62 million tourists in 2016 and international tourists were growing by about 8% in 2017 (Africa Development Bank, 2018). With the rapid increase of tourists globally and under-developed management, heritage sites have been using unsustainable manner (Agnew and Demas, 2013). Consequently, sustainability issue got attention due to negative impacts of mass tourism on heritages. Indeed, the use of visitor management tools helps to enhance

sustainable tourism development in a given destination (Neto, 2003).

Visitor management has strategy and measure to preserve authentic nature of heritages in modifying visitor attitude, experiences and behavior to enhance the positive impacts while minimizing negative impacts (Kuo, 2003; Mason, 2005; Schandau, 2017). Techniques can vary in its approach, size, and application, but its ultimate goal is achieving sustainable tourism development and tourist education (Albrecht, 2017). Visitor management is all about controlling visitor numbers, understanding visitor behavior, improve visitors experience and create enjoyment at destination but modifies visitors' on-site behavior to be more sustainable (Candrea and Ispas, 2009).

Akama (1999) stated that the concept of visitor management has to be recognized in each part of Africa since focus of tourist destination in the continent is just to maximize revenue generated from tourism without taking care of sustainability of the destinations. However, the practices of using visitor

management tools to enhance sustainable tourism development in Ethiopia is enclosed with many challenges including limited visitor management tools, low level of stakeholder collaboration, lack of control and lack of enough knowledge, problem of variety and quality of visitor experience, scant attention in community based heritage interpretation with limited interpreters and lack of organized interpretation tools (Geberekiros, 2016; Asfaw and Gebreslassie, 2016; Yihalem, 2018). Firdiywok (2012) also in his study identified problems on Fasil Ghebbi world heritage sites from visitor pressure that leads to overcrowding and deterioration on the physical structure of heritages. Due to increasing number of tourists and underdeveloped management system, Fasil Ghebbi world heritage sites suffered many problems. Deterioration and destruction due to unmanaged number and behavior of visitors in special occasions like wedding ceremony and educational trips are among others. Therefore, this study was conducted to investigate visitor management as a tool for sustainable tourism development in Fasil Ghebbi, Ethiopia.

Objectives

(i) To explore practices of hard and soft visitor management tools in Fasil Ghebbi, Gondar. (ii) To assess the challenges of implementing visitor management tools in the compound.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Visitor management can be defined as an administrative action towards maintaining the quality of tourism resources and visitor experiences (Candrea and Ispas, 2009). Visitor management from the perspective of world heritage sites need basic facilities like litter bins, visitor centers, interpretative signage, guides, associated exhibition or museum, probably listening posts, portable tape players, audiovisual displays and written material to aid visitor in discovering its history in the site (Shackley, 1998).

There are three strategies in visitor management: physical management which means managing interaction between visitors and sensitive resources to minimize the impact in the form of barriers, paths, boardwalks; regulatory management that has direct controls in the form of rules, regulations, permits and charges often imposed and enforced to prohibit human behavior; and indirect mechanisms (soft) that seek to reduce inappropriate behavior on voluntary basis through education and interpretation (Orams, 1995). Thus, visitor management strategies and tools can be broadly categorized into hard and soft visitor management tools.

Hard visitor management tools

Carrying capacity: means the maximum number of tourists who may visit the destination without causing serious destruction in the physical resources, economic and socio-cultural erosion as well as without damaging tourist experience (Kuo, 2003; Weaver, 2006; Association of Ecotourism in Romania (AER), 2009; Agnew and Demas, 2013).

Zoning: means dividing the area into clearly designated zones listing the types of tourism activities and infrastructure that would be acceptable and should be developed (UNEP, 2005). It is the principal method used to arrange visitors, and important in achieving appropriate combination of concentration and dispersal. It is designed to allocate geographical areas for specific levels and intensities of human activities and conservation (Eagles et al., 2002; Association of Ecotourism in Romania (AER), 2009).

Site hardening: Involves constructing facilities and locating trails and roads to reduce impacts of visitors on sensitive soils and vegetation, fragile structure and help to meet the visitors' needs for usable access (AER, 2009).

Waste management system: Visitors will cause environmental pollution in and around heritage (Shamshiry et al., 2011). Thus, proper waste management system must be applied and awareness of visitors should be enhanced by information and interpretation tools at a destination.

Price discrimination: Involves establishing two or more prices for the same recreation opportunity (domestic and foreign visitors, peak holidays, according to location or some other methods). This can be one of the important visitor management tools to manage impacts on the site (Candrea and Ispas, 2009).

Soft visitor management tools

Interpretation: is a big concept and involves providing information other than presentation of raw data that helps visitors to understand heritage and environment so as to get appreciation of values (Eagles et al., 2002; AER, 2009). Cave and Joliffe (2012), Kuo (2003) as well as Shackley (1998) also articulated that interpretation is informal education having first hand participatory learning about heritage and will enhance knowledge of authenticity to change attitudes and behavior of the visitors and also a vital mechanism for developing tourist sites in a sustainable manner.

Marketing, visitor research and monitoring: Visitor management is not only about protection and conservation of resources through different techniques. It should also comprise the authentic visitor experiences and understanding of the site. Then, it is important to conduct marketing, visitor research and monitoring to acquire knowledge about visitors and to assess the effectiveness of management actions (Kuo, 2003; Rojas and Camarero, 2007). This is because tourism sites in different parts of the world have been degraded or damaged due to the effects of large numbers of visitors to these natural and historic sites (El-Barmelgy, 2013).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research design and approach

The study used descriptive design along with mixed research approach to save from the pitfalls of using one single approach (Walliman, 2006). Descriptive design was used to explain and narrate the existing practices and challenges of visitor management tools in Fasil Ghebbi with the fact that descriptive research design is mainly characterized that the researcher has no control over the variables, he/she can only report what has happened or what is happening simply sets out to describe and to interpret what is (Kothari, 2004).

Population, sampling techniques and sample size determination

Population of this study was domestic and international visitors who visited Fasil Ghebbi during the study period and stakeholders including Fasil Ghebbi world heritage sites staffs, Gondar city administration culture tourism and sport department, local tour guides association, cameraman association in the compound and travel agents (Figure 1). It is impossible and not feasible to examine the whole population in the study except census studies (Kothari, 2004). Thus, this study employed non-probability sampling particularly convenience sampling technique to take representative sample from domestic and international visitors in cross sectional survey. While purposive sampling was used to take sample from stakeholders who are responsible, there is concern and expertise to participate in implementing visitor management in Fasil Ghebbi. This was due to the fact that purposive sampling is where the researcher selects what he/she thinks based on specialist knowledge or selection criteria (Walliman, 2006). To determine representative sample size from target population, the researcher used

Cochran (1977) formula which is suitable when the population is large and sampling frame is not well identified.

$$n_0 = \frac{z^2 pq}{e^2}$$

Where, n_0 = minimum sample size, z = is the selected critical value of desired confidence level, p = is the estimated proportion of an attribute that is present in the population, $q = 1 - p$ and e = is the desired level of precision. Assuming the estimated proportion of an attribute that is present in the population is 20%, then ($p = 0.2$) and taking 95% confidence level with $\pm 5\%$ precision, $z = 1.96$ the calculation for required sample size was as follow:

$$n_0 = \frac{(1.96)^2 (0.2)(0.8)}{(0.05)^2} = 246 + (5\% \text{ contingency added to fill the probability of non-response rate}) n_0 = 258$$

On the other hand, key informants having expertise, concern, responsibility and participation in implementing visitor management in Fasil Ghebbi were selected purposefully. Overall, 6 key informants were interviewed in two groups: local government experts from Gondar city administration culture tourism and sport department (1) and Fasil Ghebbi world heritage sites management (1); and tourism and related business operators including tour guide association (1), association of cameraman in the compound (1) and travel agents found in Gondar city (2).

Data collection instruments

Questionnaire: was prepared in English and Amharic languages. The questionnaire had three parts: the first part includes demographic profiles of respondents and the second part was the main body of questionnaire that contain a five-points Likert scale close ended questions which are directly related with the practice of hard and soft visitor management tools.

In depth interview: Semi structured interview questions were prepared and interview conducted with key informants that were selected purposely. The interview questions were prepared to get clear information from the key informants that are related with the specific objectives specially the challenges for implementing visitor management tools in Fasil Ghebbi.

Observation: Field observation was the other primary data collection instrument in the study with the help of checklists that could support the availability of different information tools, current practices of visitor management tools and challenges.

Data analysis plan

The data collected through questionnaire were analyzed and interpreted using descriptive statistical analysis with the help of SPSS version 25 whilst qualitative data was analyzed thematically. Each of the key informants were carefully coded and used for analysis purpose. Finally, major findings of the study were presented in the forms of descriptions, statistical descriptions, percentages, tabulations, and narration.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After data were collected through questionnaire and interview, it was cleaned, screened and entered into computer. Out of total 258 questionnaires distributed, 246 respondents gave appropriate answers for all questions provided in the questionnaire and used for analysis.

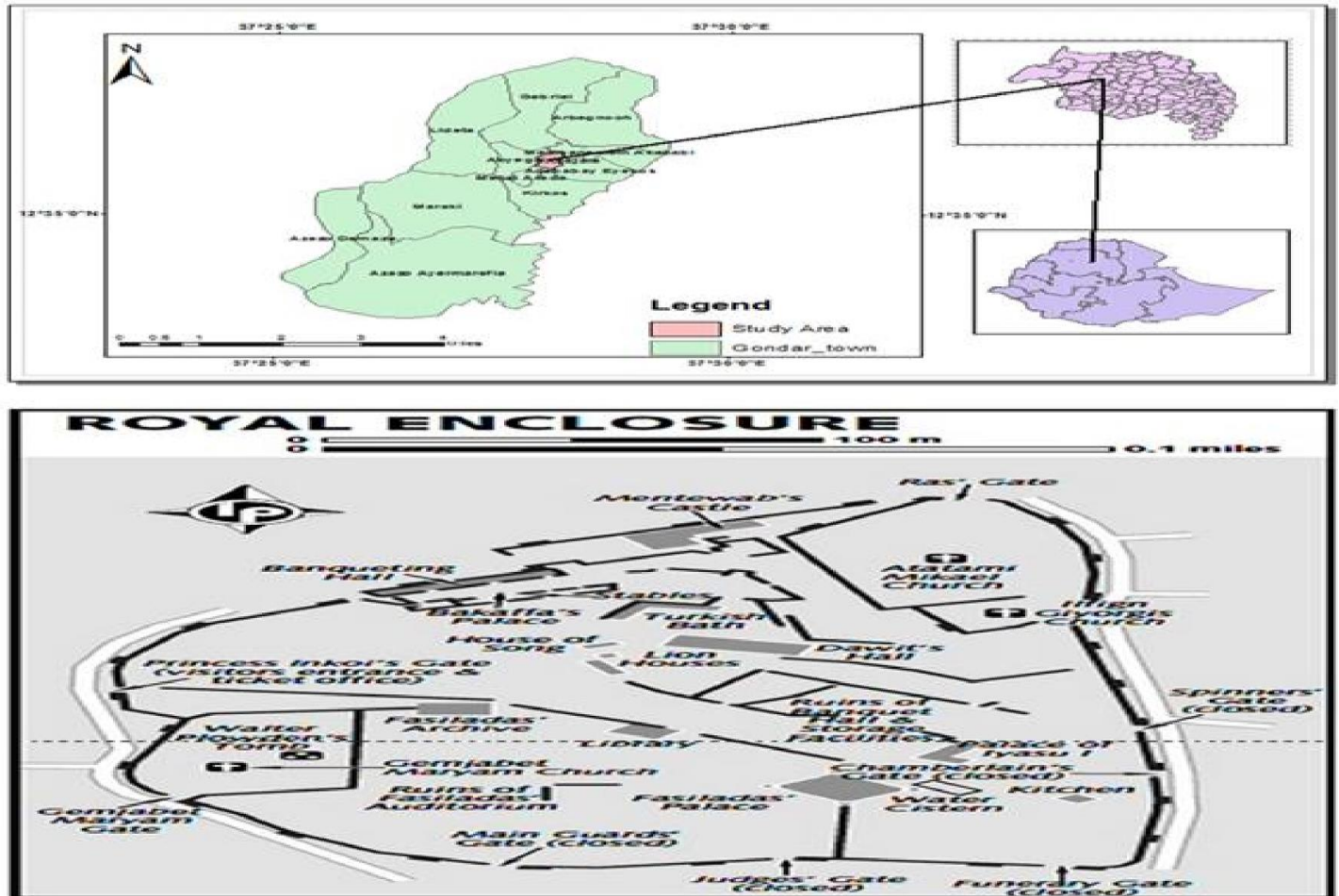


Figure 1. Map of the study area.

Source: <https://www.google.com/search?biw=thematic+map+of+gondar+city> retrieved on 26/3/2019.

Practices of hard and soft visitor management in Fasil Ghebbi

The practice of carrying capacity in Fasil Ghebbi was investigated from physical carrying capacity and group size limit point of view. As shown in the first row of Table 1 from the total respondents, 26.8% strongly disagreed with the practices of physical carrying capacity (group size limit) and the other 25.2% disagreed, while 24.8% were neutrally abstained with the practices of carrying capacity in Fasil Ghebbi. Data from key informants also shows that carrying capacity of the compound and a specific building is not studied scientifically and the tourist guides try to limit the group size in different occasions. However, still it is heavy to regulate the visitors' number during special occasions like wedding ceremony and educational trips by university students as well as know your country tourism clubs (key informants 01 and 02, April, 2019).

The researchers' observation also articulated that different groups of visitors followed the same route mostly started from Fasiledes castle, Iyasu and so on. This practice creates two side negative impacts, one is the building structure face destruction with the fleet of many groups at the same time and the other challenge was inappropriate visitor experience due to overcrowding specially at Fasiledes castle.

Table 1. Practices of hard and soft visitor management tools in Fasil Ghebbi.

Items	Respondents level of agreement in Mean					Mean
	1	2	3	4	5	
Hard visitor management tools						
Physical carrying capacity (group size limit) is practicing in Fasil Ghebbi	26.8	25.2	24.8	15.4	7.7	2.52
Zoning is practicing by separating the area into visitor service zone, recreation zone...in Fasil Ghebbi	32.5	34.6	15	13.8	4.1	2.22
Walkways and visitor facilities like toilet and seats are constructed in Fasil Ghebbi	4.5	17.5	25.2	47.6	5.3	3.32
There are adequate garbage bins and good practices of waste management in Fasil Ghebbi	10.2	22.8	25.2	39	2.8	3.02
There are restrictions hindering to enter in the fragile sites in the compound	2.4	14.2	15.9	53.7	13.8	3.62
There are fences to protect fragile structure in Fasil Ghebbi	1.6	6.1	8.5	46.3	37.4	4.12
Soft visitor management tools	1	2	3	4	5	Mean
Guides have genuine interpretation skill and provide all necessary facts and history about the site	2.4	5.3	12.2	44.3	35.8	4.06
Guides have good skill of foreign language	1.2	6.9	11.4	41.9	38.6	4.10
Awareness is created for visitors to practice in sustainable way before starting the visit	18.7	36.2	22	13.4	9.8	2.59
Information tools (printed materials, signage, signboard, visitor information center, museum) are available in the site	34.1	50.8	4.1	8.1	2.8	1.95
Services were given based on visitor demand	36.6	27.2	23.2	9.8	3.3	2.16
Grand mean				3.06		

Similarly, respondents were asked about the practices of zoning in Fasil Ghebbi. However, the mean score (2.22) publicizes that the application of separating the area into different zones were under question. From the total respondents, 34.6% strongly disagreed and 15% disagreed that zoning was not practiced in Fasil Ghebbi which implied that the application of zoning (identifying photography spot, visitor service zone, recreation, parking zone ...) in the compound was poor.

Gondar city administration culture tourism and sport department head said that the application of zoning in cultural heritages like Fasil Ghebbi is not much similar with that of the natural sites which zoning can be practiced well. Though the core and buffer zone were identified, the application in performing what tasks to be done in each zone is still difficult. The royal enclosure is located in the core zone where visitation took place and zoning is practiced through identifying the one which is vulnerable to threat would be closed or prohibited for visitation.

The 3rd row of the table shows that 47.6% of the respondents agreed that site hardening is practicing through constructing walkways and fulfilling visitor facilities like toilet and seats made from stone in

the compound. The other respondents (5.3%) strongly agreed with the idea that the practice of site hardening is applicable in Fasil Ghebbi. On the contrary, 17.5% of the respondents disagreed which implied that site hardening is not practiced in proper way and small portion of the respondents (4.5%) strongly disagreed with this idea which means site hardening is not practiced at all. As indicated from mean (3.32), there are good practices of site hardening including constructed walkways and visitor facilities. However, more walkways and visitor facilities should be constructed including more seats as well as full purpose toilets expected from a world heritage site.

The practice of waste management system in Fasil Ghebbi was average with mean score of 3.02 which implied good availability of garbage bins and good practices of removing wastes from both visitors and the management staff. However, it is not ample and needs further reform to make the compound more litter free and attractive for visitors. As shown in Table 1 (rows 5 and 6), the practices of access control was applied as an important concept of visitor management tools in the compound.

Of the total respondents, 46.3% agreed and 37.4% strongly agreed that there were fences to protect the fragile sites of the compound with the mean score of 4.12. Likewise, 53.7 and 13.8% of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed that there was restriction which prohibits entering in the fragile sites respectively. Field observation also articulated that different castles including Fasiledes castle ground and second floor, Yohannes castle and Mentewab castle were closed and some other parts of the ruined wesheba gimb, the up story at Balderas gate, the tunnel to Yohannes castle and other fragile structures were protected using fences and written instructions.

Significantly, the uses of soft visitor management tools are fundamental which incorporated the application of communication/interpretation to deliver series of messages (information) to visitors. It aims to provide an enjoyable experience to visitors through educating visitors what to do and not to do in the destination (Kuo, 2013). Consequently, the practices of soft visitor management tools in Fasil Ghebbi were assessed through examining the guides personal interpretation skills and availability of interpretation tools in the compound. Though guides have genuine interpretation skill and provide all necessary facts and history about the site and have also good skill of English language with mean score of 4.06 and 4.10 respectively, they did not create awareness for visitors to practice in sustainable way before starting the visit with mean score of 2.59. From the total respondents, 18.7% strongly disagreed, 36.2% disagreed and 22% were refrained with the idea that awareness was given to the visitors prior to their visitation. This implied that guides were not responsible to brief visitors on how to behave during visitation. Of all, there are no adequate information tools in Fasil Ghebbi with mean score of 1.95. Observation of the researcher also confirmed that there are no magazines, newspaper, brochures, leaflets, guidebooks, maps, audiovisual display, museum, listening post and the like in the compound which are very basic and should be fulfilled in any of world heritage site.

Finally, visitors were asked whether the services provided in the compound were based on their demand or not. Thus, 36.6 and 27.2% of the respondents strongly disagreed and disagreed with the idea whereas 23.2% were neutral. This implied that marketing and visitor research practices in Fasil Ghebbi were poor hence services were not given based on visitors demand.

Challenges of visitor management practices in Fasil Ghebbi

The study identified many challenges which might be causes of the poor practices and low implementation of visitor management tools. Thus, according to the key informants, the following challenges were identified in Fasil Ghebbi in implementing visitor management techniques:

Lack of application/implementation: the great challenge for Ethiopian tourism development was unclear tourism policies and strategies (Robinson and Jonker, 2016) and still it is a problem for most destinations. However, today's big challenge in implementing visitor management in Fasil Ghebbi is lack of implementation or application (key informant 05, May, 2019). There is a destination management plan (UOG and ARCCCH, 2016) for Fasil Ghebbi world heritage sites but a great evidence for the low application of this plan was the poor practices of visitor management tools in the compound. Robinson and Jonker (2016) also concluded that tourism development policy of Ethiopia has not been implemented to a significant degree.

Shortage of budget and scant attention: Government of Ethiopia paid scant attention for tourism sector even though the money collected from world heritage sites were collected by federal government. Fasil Ghebbi world heritage sites manager justified that Authority for Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage (ARCCCH) is the responsible organ to set budget for management and conservation of the heritage but did not offer enough budget rather the visitor management and conservation practice is performed by the regional government and city administration. Similarly, Gondar city administration culture tourism and sport department head portrayed that ARCCCH totally ignored Fasil Ghebbi world heritage sites. Conservation practices and development of visitor facilities were done by money allocated (around 7 million birr for 2011 E.C.) by the city administration even though the practices were under performed. Though budget was a challenge to implement visitor management, local tourism office including Gondar city administration culture tourism and sport department, 2018 and central Gondar zone culture and tourism office could not convince the responsible body (ARCCCH) to set enough budget for management of Fasil Ghebbi world heritage sites (key informant 03, April, 2019). Scant attention of management and officials were another challenge that might be responsible for budget cut.

Lack of stakeholder involvement and collaboration: Tourism development policy of Ethiopia (2009) still stated community participation and partnership among stakeholders as one of the basic principles to guide Ethiopian tourism development. However, practical awareness, involvement, cooperation and capacity of the key stakeholders in the management of visitors and the destination are very limited. Unclear direction for different stakeholder numbers and levels of involvement, domination of tourism benefits by a few individuals and resource shortages are common challenges in stakeholder involvement and collaboration in the site (key informant 05, May, 2019).

Lack of visitor management tools and visitor facilities: There is poor availability of visitor management tools in the royal enclosure. Local tour guides association president confirmed that visitor facilities found in the royal enclosure is very limited; shortage of portable and fixed toilets, absence of security camera in the compound, absence of museum, lack of adequate signage, lack of garbage bins are among others. Moreover, observation of the researcher also confirmed that there are no magazines, newspaper, brochures, leaflets, guidebooks, maps, audiovisual display, museum, listening post and the like in the compound.

...carrying capacity is not yet studied, zoning system is not appropriate and availability and practices of information tools was found poor apart from poor waste management system in the compound. Thus, limited number or absence of visitor management tools was the other challenge for the low practices of management tools.

Lack of skilled human power: It is obvious that lack of professionals is the bottleneck for tourism industry in Ethiopia at all and the same is true for Fasil Ghebbi. One of the representatives from travel agents replied many points and was translated in English as follows:

Lack of skilled security guards having grace and knowledge about tourism; lack of qualified and responsible tour guides who provide qualified service, information and interpretation; absence of well-educated and skilled management staff who provides direction on the application of visitor management tools and fulfillment of the techniques, cleaning staff who have knowledge of proper waste management and proper use of garbage bins and able to educate visitors, ticketing officer, information desk and lack of skilled administration are among the challenges in implementing visitor management in the compound (key informant 02, April , 2019).

Unlike the above key informant's idea, there are educated tourism professionals in the labor market rather the problem is poor attention of local government officials who failed to hire qualified employees.

Relatively, tour guides association is the only professional association who provide service for visitors even though it has its own pitfalls. Thus, what is expected from local tourism department is hiring qualified tourism professionals and or providing training (Key informant 06, May, 2019).

Lack of responsibility: This was another big challenge in practicing visitor management in Fasil Ghebbi at least from two sides: negligence from service providers on how to regulate visitors' behavior. Based on informal discussion, one of the security guard verified the following idea:

We do not care about the number and sizes of visitors come to the compound. We did not get special benefit from it and we do not want to struggle with the people we know before and the one we meet outside. Therefore, we would permit everybody to enter the compound.

However, most business-related stakeholders are not focusing on the sustainability of the heritage and they simply think about the daily benefits that can be exploited for personal use from tourism. On the other hand, from the visitor's perspective ease of responsibility during visitation like ease understanding of restrictions and climbing on the fragile sites was observed on domestic visitors.

Lack of knowledge and awareness: other problem which would not overlook easily is lack of knowledge/ awareness in Ethiopian tourism. As a result, the fate of Fasil Ghebbi was not different. Lack of awareness from both service providers and visitors specifically domestic visitors were predominantly the big challenge in practicing visitor management.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

Findings showed that practices of visitor management tools to enhance sustainable tourism development in Fasil Ghebbi were not adequate. Investigation in current practices of visitor management tools in Fasil Ghebbi showed that only some of the visitor management tools were proficient in a good situation while the practices of most of the tools were in infant stages. Thus, access control, interpretation skills related with guides' skill of English language and genuine interpretation practiced well, while site hardening and waste management system were found in average position. On the other hand, carrying capacity is not yet studied scientifically and not practiced; zoning was not practiced well and weak marketing and visitor research. Subsequently, Fasil Ghebbi world heritage site is vulnerable to threat due to poor practices of visitor management tools apart from other factors which is not studied in this work.

Consequently, there were many challenges hindering the implementation of those tools in the royal enclosure. As a result, poor application or implementation of visitor management tools, shortage of

budget and poor attention of local government officials to convince responsible federal government body to set budget, lack of skilled human power due to overlooked activities of the destination management to hire skilled human power, lack of stakeholder collaborations, absence and limited visitor management tools and visitor facilities, negligence of responsibilities and lack of knowledge and awareness were the challenges identified in this study and are responsible for the low practices of visitor management tools in Fasil Ghebbi. The following recommendations were drawn from the findings of this study:

(i) ARCCCH is highly responsible to provide adequate budget for conservation and management of the heritage. (ii) Fasil Ghebbi world heritage sites management should create favorable conditions to collaborate with all stakeholders in the management of the destination particularly in managing visitors and ensuring sustainability.

(iii) ARCCCH should pay due attention in fulfilling different visitor facilities and visitor management tools expected from a world heritage site. Well functioned toilets with appropriate number; many seats; museum; interpretation tools including guide books, map, leaflet, brochures, more signage in Amharic and English language, newspaper, more signboards and panels; appropriate zoning and limiting activities to be conducted in buffer zones; more walkways, fences, adequate dust bins etc. should be fulfilled along with conservation of sites.

(iv) University of Gondar, department of tourism management in collaboration with ARCCCH should conduct research in the study area to determine the carrying capacities of the site and building structures scientifically as well as to fix number of visitors per guide to minimize overcrowding and to provide qualified service for visitors.

(v) Concise responsibilities must be given to government officials, tourism business operators and local communities to create sustainable visitor management strategies.

(vi) Tourist guides should provide orientation prior to visitation about the codes of conduct, what to do and not to do and how to behave in a sustainable manner. It is also better to have independent interpretation professionals apart from guides and written documents.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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