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PUBLIC BODIES' SUPPORT FOR THE SUSTAINABILITY OF SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED TOURISM ENTERPRISES IN THE EASTERN CAPE PROVINCE, SOUTH AFRICA**Bulelwa Nguza-Mduna ^{1*}, Anthony Kambi Masha ²**^{1*} *Walter Sisulu University, Faculty of Management and Public Administration Sciences, Ibika Campus, Main Road N2, Butterworth, 4960, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa*² *Walter Sisulu University, Department of Public Management and Governance, Corner Grey and Station Road, Queenstown, 5319, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa*E-mails:^{1*} amasha@wsu.ac.za (Corresponding author); ² bnquza-maduba@wsu.ac.za*Received 15 January 2026; accepted 4 June 2026; published 30 June 2026*

Abstract. This study examines the role of public bodies in supporting SMTEs. The authors acknowledge that the involvement of public entities in strengthening the capacity and resilience of SMTEs is becoming increasingly critical in today's economic environment. SMTEs comprise a substantial portion of the tourism industry, accounting for over 80% of business activity in many regions. Their growth fosters local economic development, encourages cultural exchange, and promotes innovation within communities. Public bodies play a vital role in facilitating this growth through various strategic actions, such as providing financial support, developing policies, and offering resources essential for the sustainability of these businesses. The research was conducted with the understanding that, although multiple studies have explored the topic, a significant gap exists regarding the role of public bodies in promoting the sustainability of SMTEs, particularly in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa. A quantitative approach was used, involving a cross-sectional survey of 160 respondents, SMTE owners in the Eastern Cape, to gather insights from key stakeholders knowledgeable about SMTE ownership in the region. To ensure the instrument accurately measured what it intended to, the study tested its validity, specifically using the content validity index technique. A pilot survey was conducted with 45 respondents from a different population than the main sample. Based on this pilot, the content validity index for the entire instrument and individual items was calculated. The validity indices ranged from 0.79 to 0.81 for the overall instrument and for the scales POG, GF, POR, POAI, PORF, and SOTSMEs, respectively. All coefficients exceeded or closely approached the 0.78 threshold, confirming the instrument's validity. The study tested eight hypotheses, of which four were rejected, and four were supported.

Keywords: Public bodies; small-medium tourism enterprises; SMEs; entrepreneurship; government

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JEL Classification: L26

1. Introduction

The role of SMEs in economic development is multifaceted, extending beyond mere job creation to encompass broader socio-economic benefits. SMEs act as the backbone of the economy, providing essential employment opportunities that help alleviate poverty and foster economic resilience (Javadi et al., 2024; Musabayana, 2024; Masha & Mdeni, 2025). Thus, this impact is equally critical in advanced economies, wherein SMEs play a pivotal role in maintaining economic dynamism and adaptability.

SMEs are increasingly recognised as vital contributors to socio-economic development across various regions, particularly in developing nations. Their role extends beyond mere economic output to encompass job creation,

innovation, and enhancement of income distribution, thereby fostering an inclusive economic environment (Yáñez-Valdés et al., 2023; Gamede, 2023; Odeyemi et al., 2024). As numerous studies highlight, SMEs significantly contribute to employment and Gross Domestic Product (GDP); they represent approximately 90% of businesses globally and employ around half of the world's workforce (Nyikana & Bama, 2023; Hutmanová et al., 2024). This underlines their fundamental role not just as businesses but as engines driving socio-economic change and resilience.

Worldwide, governments continually struggle to manage and address microeconomic problems. Although “no software can predict the future”, SMEs have been seen as a solution to South Africa’s future unemployment dilemma (Cilliers, 2017, p. 105), as well as to macroeconomic problems of stagnation or recession. Therefore, many governments are consequently and actively seeking ways to promote and encourage entrepreneurship among their citizens. Notably, the promotion and support for SMEs have become pivotal in the South African government's strategy to combat unemployment and foster economic growth, in line with the National Development Plan (NDP) of 2015, which indicates that the sector is expected to create 90% of employment by 2030.

The role of SMEs in times of economic crisis is indispensable, as they tend to preserve jobs and help keep the community stable even when the rest of the economy is facing difficulties (Daraojimba et al., 2023). Therefore, to address the challenges, the government of South Africa has taken several steps to enhance SMEs. Government agencies such as the National Youth Development Agency (NYDA), the Small Enterprise Finance Agency (SEFA), the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC), and Business Partners. Moreover, other government departments aid SMEs. These are: The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), the Department of Economic Development (DED), the Presidency, and the Department of Agriculture.

Moreover, the initiatives and enabling policies provided by the government to improve the performance and sustainability of SMMES are essential for maximising their capacity to generate employment (Rochman et al., 2024). These policies are White Paper on National Strategy on the Development and Promotion of Small Businesses of 1995 (WPNSDPSB), the ten-point plan on procurement reform, 1995 (TPP), the South African National Small Business Act 102 of 1996 (NSBA), the Green paper on public sector procurement reform in South Africa of 1997 (GPPSPR), the Skills Development Act 97 of 1998 (as amended in 1999, 2003 (BBBEEA), and the revised preferential procurement regulations of 2011 (RPPR).

The special attention in public policy to Small and Medium-sized tourism enterprises (SMTEs) contributes to their resilience. This is consistent with the results of Seow et al. (2024), who explain that adaptive power and cross-supply chain partnerships are essential to SMTEs to succeed during crises. The government agencies like the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), the Eastern Cape Development Corporation (ECDC), the National Department of Tourism, the Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA), the Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA), the Eastern Cape Department of Economic Development and Environmental Affairs and Tourism, the Eastern Cape Socio-Economic Consultative Council (ECSECC), the National Small Business Act of 1996, and the Tourism Enterprise Programme (TEP) (2011) can expand the functional capabilities of SMTEs and empower them to manage external shocks, including economic downturns or global pandemics.

This study focuses on the role of public bodies in boosting SMTEs. The authors recognise that the involvement of public bodies in enhancing the capacity and resilience of SMTEs is increasingly essential in today's economic landscape. SMTEs constitute a significant share of the tourism industry, accounting for over 80% of business volume in many regions (Wang & Zhang, 2024). Their proliferation supports local economic development, promotes cultural exchange, and drives innovation across communities (Anaba et al., 2024). Public bodies play a crucial role in facilitating this growth through strategic interventions, including financial support, policymaking, and the provision of resources necessary for the sustainability of these enterprises.

2. Statement of the Problem

SMEs in tourism, also known as SMTEs, are gaining momentum. These ventures not only contribute to economic diversification but also serve as cultural ambassadors, promoting Africa's rich heritage and creativity on the global stage. By nurturing these industries, African entrepreneurs can contribute to a more balanced and sustainable economic portfolio (Kenji, 2024; Adaga et al., 2024). Beyond their economic impact, SMTEs serve as powerful tools for social empowerment and community development in South Africa. When entrepreneurs succeed, they not only uplift themselves but also create a ripple effect that positively influences the communities around them.

Globally, governments consistently endeavour to address and resolve microeconomic issues. Consequently, to address the challenges, the South African government has implemented various measures to enhance SMTEs. As Several government agencies and departments, along with supportive policies, exist to boost SMTEs. Although several studies have examined the above-mentioned topic, a notable gap in the research is the lack of research on the role of public bodies in enhancing the sustainability of SMTEs in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa. This study examines the role of public bodies in supporting SMTEs, a vital aspect of today's economic landscape.

3. Review of Selected Literature

Role of Public Bodies in Boosting SMTEs

The involvement of public bodies in enhancing the capacity and resilience of SMTEs is increasingly essential in today's economic landscape. SMTEs constitute a significant share of the tourism industry, accounting for over 80% of business volume in many regions (Wang & Zhang, 2024). Their proliferation supports local economic development, promotes cultural exchange, and drives innovation across communities (Anaba et al., 2024). Public bodies play a crucial role in facilitating this growth through various strategic interventions, such as financial support, policy-making, and the provision of resources necessary for the sustainability of these enterprises.

Public policies directed at SMTEs foster their resilience through targeted support. This aligns with the findings of Seow et al., who emphasise that adaptive capability and collaboration across supply chains are crucial for SMEs to thrive in the face of crises (Seow et al., 2024). Government initiatives, including funding programs and regulatory frameworks, can enhance SMEs' operational capacities and enable them to better withstand external shocks, such as economic downturns or global pandemics. Specifically, the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy in various countries has implemented policies to empower local tourism enterprises, leading to a rejuvenation of the tourism sector post-COVID-19.

Moreover, the digital transformation of SMEs is pivotal in enhancing their competitiveness and efficiency. As noted by Wang and Zhang (2024), SMTEs must adopt innovative digital tools to navigate the challenges presented by globalisation and technological advancements (Wang & Zhang, 2024). Such digital inclusivity allows SMEs to engage consumers more effectively and streamline their operations, thereby contributing to their overall growth. The use of digital marketing strategies is particularly impactful, as highlighted by Purnawati (2024), who notes that technological integration directly correlates with increased sales turnover in SMTEs.

Financial inclusion is another critical area in which public bodies can have a substantial impact on SMTEs. According to Li et al. (2024), financially inclusive measures, such as access to credit and investment opportunities, can directly influence tourism demand and profitability. This is particularly crucial for small businesses that often struggle with funding constraints. By facilitating access to capital, the public sector can enable SMEs to invest in their growth, thereby increasing their resilience and capacity to adapt to market changes.

The regulatory environment established by public bodies also plays a crucial role in shaping the operational landscape for SMTEs. Overly restrictive regulations can stifle innovation and growth, while supportive legislative frameworks can propel SMEs towards competitive prominence. Altman and Cheng (2024) emphasise the

importance of establishing a holistic regulatory framework that addresses the specific needs of SMEs and facilitates their integration into broader economic strategies.

Moreover, the involvement of public bodies in SMTEs extends to providing technical and educational support. Training programmes designed to enhance managerial skills and operational knowledge can significantly strengthen the capabilities of SMTE owners and staff. This educational component is essential in equipping tourism enterprises with the skills necessary to thrive in increasingly competitive and technologically advanced environments. As noted by Giraldo et al. (2024), such efforts can improve customer experience and enhance service delivery in the tourism sector.

To further facilitate SMTEs' growth, public bodies must also encourage collaboration among enterprises across tourism sectors. By fostering networks that promote knowledge sharing and resource pooling, SMEs can enhance their market reach and operational efficiency. This collaborative approach not only nurtures innovation but also strengthens community bonds, ensuring that the benefits of tourism are distributed more equitably among local populations, as suggested by Ngondo et al. (2024) in their exploration of domestic tourism dynamics.

The interplay between public bodies and SMEs in the tourism sector is characterised by a multifaceted approach that includes financial support, policy advocacy, capacity building, and the promotion of sustainable practices. The successful enhancement of SMTEs is contingent on a strategic partnership between the government and these enterprises, which ultimately bolsters local economies, enriches the tourism landscape, and prepares these businesses for future challenges. The resilience, innovation, and adaptability of SMTEs can be considerably enhanced through continuous support from public bodies, ensuring that they not only survive but thrive in an ever-changing industry landscape.

Hypotheses

Our research hypotheses are as follows:

H₀1 There is a significant relationship between the provision of grants by public bodies and the sustainability of SMTEs in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa.

H₀2 *There is a significant relationship between funding by public bodies and the sustainability of SMTEs in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa.*

H₀3 There is a significant relationship between the provision of rebates by public bodies and the sustainability of SMTEs in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa.

H₀4 There is a significant relationship between adequate infrastructure and the sustainability of SMTEs in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa.

H₀5 There is a significant relationship between the provision of recreational facilities and the sustainability of SMTEs in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa.

H₀6 There is a significant relationship between respondents' perceptions of public bodies' support for the sustainability of SMTEs and gender.

H₀7 There is a significant relationship between respondents' perceptions of public bodies' support for SMTEs' sustainability and age group.

H_0 8 There is a significant relationship between respondents' perceptions of public bodies' support for the sustainability of SMTEs and their occupation.

5. Methodology

This study employed a non-experimental, descriptive, and correlational design and evaluated reliability and validity using statistical analysis. The study used a quantitative research approach because it was able to look for ways to find relations between variables (Bartley & Hashemi, 2024), and it allowed for the use of large sums of questionnaires to allow for generalisation, which is referred to by Anakpo and (2024) as the extent to which the research findings in one setting can be applied to other settings.

The study employed a cross-sectional survey of 160 SMTE owners in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa, to elicit the perceptions of well-informed stakeholders in SMTE ownership.

This study is premised on positivism viewpoint. A paradigm refers to a particular style of perceiving the universe, implying that paradigms are patterns or systems by which reality is seen (Means & Mowatt, 2024; Bartley & Hashemi, 2024). This research required a systematic approach grounded in empirical studies. Positivism in this context enabled the understanding of knowledge as a product of a systematic procedure involving quantifiable analysis, scientific methodology, and an empirical outlook for grasping the world. The positivist research paradigm had a profound effect on the methodology and findings of the study (William, 2024). The rigidity and even quantitative nature of positivism were observed in the use of numerical data and statistics in this study. The deductive reasoning method, in which ideas are rigorously evaluated against empirical evidence, is situated within a positivist framework, the primary paradigm of this research. Positivists promote the application of natural-scientific methodologies to investigate phenomena, including social phenomena, and prioritise the pursuit of truth through empirical validation, thereby facilitating the collection and interpretation of data using quantitative techniques. In this study, positivism emphasised the need for rigorous techniques that enhance the trustworthiness of research outcomes (William, 2024). The study questions of this paradigm were formulated to elicit information and can solely be addressed using a quantitative research methodology. Consequently, this research affirmed positivism, which holds that only scientific approaches can elucidate the universe, encompassing both the natural and social realms.

The study used stratified random sampling to select the participants. Stratification was done based on the status of stakeholders (owners, managers) and the unemployed, and respondents were selected using the lottery technique based on the statuses of respondents within each stratum, with simple random sampling.

6. Study Findings

6.1 Test for Validity

To ensure the instrument measured what it was intended to measure, the study tested its validity. Specifically, the content validity index technique was used. A pilot test was conducted with 45 respondents from a population different from that of the main study. Using responses from this pilot test, the content validity index for the instrument's scale (entire instrument) and item levels was calculated. The content validity indices ranged from 0.79 to 0.81 for the whole instrument and for POG, GF, POR, POAI, PORF, and SOTSMEs, respectively. All coefficients were above or approximately 0.78. Therefore, the instrument meets the validity requirements, as the threshold of 0.78 is consistent with those reported by Inegbedion et al. (2024) (see Table 1).

Table 1. Validity Tests

Construct	S-CVI	I-CVI	Number of Items
Entire Instrument	0.80		24
Provision of grants		0.81	4
Government funding		0.80	4
Provision of adequate infrastructure		0.78	4
Provision of recreational facilities		0.79	4
Sustainability of SMTEs		0.80	4

The study also tested the instrument's reliability to ensure internal consistency. In this respect, it used the Cronbach's alpha technique. The calculated Cronbach's alpha values were 0.774, 0.68, 0.78, 0.71, 0.69, 0.74 and 0.74 for the entire instrument, use of quantitative techniques provision of grants, government financing, provision of rebates, provision of adequate infrastructure, provision of recreational facilities, and the sustainability of tourist small, micro and medium enterprises respectively. All the computed alpha values were approximately 0.7 or above. Consequently, it is reasonable to conclude that the instrument is reliable, in line with Hair et al. (2021) (see Table 2). It is pertinent to note that Cronbach's alpha values for government funding and rebate provision were initially 0.48 and 0.18, respectively; however, after revising the number of items used to measure the two indicators and retesting, the values increased to 0.78 and 0.71, respectively (See Table 2).

Table 2. Validity Tests

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
Entire Instrument	0.774 (0.88)	24
Provision of grants	0.68	4
Government funding	0.48 (0.78)	4
Provision of rebates	0.18 (0.71)	4
Provision of adequate infrastructure	0.69	4
Provision of recreational facilities	0.74	4
Sustainability of STMEs	0.72	4

Following favourable validity and reliability test results, the study administered the instrument to the sampled respondents. The questionnaires were administered through Google Forms. The results of the tests are presented below:

T-test for the significance of the respondents' perception of public support for SMTEs.

The study examined the significance of respondents' perceptions of how public support through grants affects the sustainability of SMTEs. The results indicated that respondents who agreed that public support through grants influences the sustainability of SMTEs had a mean of 3.49 and a standard deviation of 0.646. Compared to a test value of 3.000, this produced a mean difference of approximately 0.490. A t-test for the significance of this mean difference yielded a computed t-value of 9.31 ($p < 0.01$), indicating the result is statistically significant. Therefore, grant funding has a significant impact on SMTE sustainability (see Table 3).

Secondly, the study tested the significance of respondents' perceptions of how public support, through government financing of SMTEs, influences SMTE sustainability. The results showed that respondents who agreed that public support through government financing influences the sustainability of SMTEs had a mean of 3.12 and a standard deviation of 0.6282. Against a test value of 3.000, this resulted in a mean difference of approximately 0.1188. A t-test for the significance of the mean difference yielded a computed t-value of 2.39 ($p = 0.018$), indicating statistical significance. Considering this finding, the provision of grants to SMTEs has a significant impact on their sustainability (see Table 3).

Thirdly, the study tested the significance of respondents' perceptions of how public support through rebate provision influences the sustainability of SMTEs. The results showed that respondents who agreed that public support through rebates influences the sustainability of SMTEs had a mean of 3.48 and a standard deviation of 0.4428. Against a test value of 3.000, a mean difference of approximately 0.4800 was obtained. A t-test for the significance of the mean difference yielded a computed t value of 13.66 ($p < 0.01$), indicating that the difference is statistically significant. Based on this finding, the provision of rebates to SMTEs has a significant impact on their sustainability (see Table 3).

Fourthly, the study examined the significance of respondents' perceptions regarding the impact of adequate infrastructure on the sustainability of SMTEs. The results showed that respondents who agreed that public support through adequate infrastructure influences the sustainability of SMTEs had a mean of 3.34 and a standard deviation of 0.4409. Against a test value of 3.000, this resulted in a mean difference of approximately 0.3400. A t-test for the significance of the mean difference yielded a computed t-value of 10.11 ($p < 0.000$), indicating that the difference is statistically significant. Given this finding, adequate infrastructure significantly influences the sustainability of SMTEs (see Table 3).

Fifthly and lastly, the study tested the significance of respondents' perceptions of how public support, through the provision of recreational facilities, influences the sustainability of SMTEs. The results showed that respondents who agreed that public support through the provision of recreational facilities influences the sustainability of SMTEs had a mean of 3.58 and a standard deviation of 0.4606. Against a test value of 3.000, this resulted in a mean difference of approximately 0.4606. A t-test for the significance of the mean difference yielded a computed t-value of 16.15 ($p < 0.000$), indicating that the difference is statistically significant. Considering this finding, the provision of recreational facilities significantly influences the sustainability of SMTEs (see Table 3).

Table 3. Provision of public support for the sustainability of SMTEs

Variable	Mean.	Std Dev.	Mean Difference	t	Sig (2-tailed)
POG	3.49	0.6463	0.4859	9.51	0.000
GF	3.12	0.6282	0.1188	2.39	0.018
POR	3.48	0.4428	0.3516	13.66	0.000
POAI	3.34	0.4409	0.3516	10.11	0.000
PORF	3.58	0.4606	0.5844	16.05	0.000
SOTSMEs	3.52	0.4032	0.5234	16.42	0.000

6.2 Tests for Goodness of Fit

This section presents tests of the study's model fit to the cross-sectional data.

The results of the adjusted R-square are 0.715, and the value of the adjusted R-square is 0.708. The implication is that 70.8% of the variation in the variability in the sustainability of SMTEs is caused by variability in the hypothesised indicators of the public support for the sustainability of SMTEs (provision of grants, government financing, provision of rebates, provision of adequate infrastructure, and the provision of recreational facilities) (See Table 4).

Table 4. Overall Model Fit

Model	R	R-Square	Adjusted R Square	Durbin-Watson
1	0.846	0.715	0.708	1.69

Predictors: constant, POG, GF, POR, POAI, PORF

Dependent variable STSMEs

The F test for the goodness of fit reveals that the computed F statistics and the associated p-value are 71.434 ($p < 0.000$). To this end, the null hypothesis that the model is not a good fit for the data is rejected at the 1% level. The implication is that the model is a good fit to the data (See Table 5).

Table 5. ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	18.494	5	3.699	77.434	0.000
	Residual	7.356	154	0.048		
	Total	25.850	158			

Predictors: constant, POG, GF, POR, POAI, PORF

Dependent variable STSMEs

6.3 Test for Significance of Data

The study tested for the degree of association between the hypothesised indicators of public bodies' support and the sustainability of SMTEs (provision of grants, government financing, provision of rebates, provision of adequate infrastructure and the provision of recreational facilities). The results showed that four out of the six indicators (government financing, provision of rebates, provision of proper infrastructure and the provision of recreational facilities) have significant relationships with the sustainability of SMTEs. One of those essential relationships is negative (i.e., the relationship between rebate provision and SMTEs' sustainability). However, the provision of grants is positively associated with the sustainability of SMTEs, but this relationship is not statistically significant.

The positive relationship between government financing and the sustainability of SMTEs is statistically significant, indicating that government financing has a considerable influence on SMTE sustainability in South Africa.

In addition, the provision of adequate infrastructure and the sustainability of SMTEs, as well as the positive relationship between the provision of recreational facilities and SMTEs, and the negative relationship between the provision of rebates and the sustainability of SMTEs, are all significant, as indicated by p-values less than 0.05. Consequently, the associated null hypotheses are rejected accordingly. Thus, government financing, adequate infrastructure, and recreational facilities have statistically significant positive effects on the sustainability of SMTEs in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa. In contrast, rebates have a statistically significant adverse impact on the sustainability of SMTEs (See Table 6).

Table 6. Regression Coefficients

Model	Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	.t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Constant	0.879	0.182		3.738	0.000
POG	-0.005	0.031	- 0.008	-0.171	0.864
GF	0.105	0.032	0.163	3.314	0.001
POR	- 0.499	0.070	- 0.548	-7.091	0.000
POAI	0.792	0.055	0.864	14.320	0.000
PORF	0.451	0.059	0.516	7.631	0.000

The study's seventh hypothesis examined the relationship between respondents' perceptions and demographic variables (gender, Age, and Occupation). The results indicate that the Fender test and the associated significant probabilities for gender, age, and occupation are 1.297 (0.276), 1.282 (0.311), and 1.794 (0.170), respectively. Given that none of the p-values are less than 0.05, we do not reject the null hypotheses that respondents' perceptions of the influence of public bodies' support are unrelated to respondents' demographic variables (gender, age, and occupation) (see Table 7).

Table 7. Respondents' Perception of The Public Support for SMTEs And Demographic Variables (Gender, Age, and Occupation)

Demographic Variable	F	Sig (2-tailed)
Gender	1.297	0.276
Age	1.282	0.311
Occupation	1.794	0.170

6.4 Interpretation of Findings

The study's first objective was to determine the extent to which public bodies' grant improvements enhance the sustainability of SMTEs in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa. This objective was achieved in hypothesis one by examining the relationship between public support for SMTEs through grant provision and SMTE sustainability. The results of the one-sample t-test indicate that grant provision has a significant impact on the sustainability of SMTEs. However, the regression results reveal that the positive coefficient is not statistically significant. The discrepancy between the one-sample t-test results and the regression findings suggests that, while grants may have the potential to boost the sustainability of SMTEs, as indicated by the one-sample t-test, the actual situation is that grants have not had a meaningful impact on SMTEs, possibly because there are no grants currently, or the grants provided are minimal.

The study's second objective sought to determine the extent to which government financing enhances the sustainability of SMTEs in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa. This objective was achieved in hypothesis two by examining the relationship between public support for SMTEs through government financing and SMTE sustainability. The one-sample t-test and regression results indicate that the positive coefficient is statistically significant. The implication is that government financing is significantly associated with the sustainability of SMTEs. The agreement between the one-sample t-test and the regression results suggests that SMTEs in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa, are feeling the impact of government financing.

The study's third objective sought to determine the extent to which public support through rebates enhances the sustainability of SMTEs in the Eastern Cape province, South Africa. This objective was realised in hypothesis three by testing the association between public support for SMTEs through rebate provision and SMTE

sustainability. The one-sample t-test and regression results indicate that the provision of rebates has a statistically significant effect on SMTEs' sustainability. However, while the one-sample t-test yields a positive result, the regression yields a negative result. The implication is that there is an expected positive relationship between the provision of rebates and SMTEs' sustainability. The negative relationship in the regression model suggests that there are currently no significant rebates. The provision of rebates does not have any positive predictive power for the sustainability of SMTEs.

The study's fourth objective sought to determine the extent to which public support, through adequate infrastructure provision, enhances the sustainability of SMTEs in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa. This objective was realised in Hypothesis Four by testing the association between public support for SMTEs, as reflected in adequate infrastructure, and the sustainability of SMTEs. The one-sample t-test and regression results indicate that the positive coefficient is statistically significant. The implication is that sufficient infrastructure is significantly associated with the sustainability of SMTEs. The agreement between the one-sample t-test and the regression results suggests that the government is doing its best to provide infrastructure that facilitates the effective functioning of SMTEs in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa.

The study's fifth objective was to determine the extent to which public support, through the provision of recreational facilities, enhances the sustainability of SMTEs in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa. This objective was realised in hypothesis five by testing the association between public support for SMTEs, as reflected in the provision of recreational facilities, and the sustainability of SMTEs. The one-sample t-test and regression results indicate that the positive coefficient is statistically significant. The implication is that the provision of recreational facilities is significantly associated with the sustainability of SMTEs. The agreement between the one-sample t-test and the regression results suggests that the government is doing enough to provide recreational facilities that enable the effective functioning of SMTEs in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa.

Lastly, an F-test of the differences between subgroups of the demographic variables (gender, age, and occupation) shows that the F-values were not significant, as none of the p-values was less than 0.05, the assumed level of significance. Consequently, none of the null hypotheses is rejected. The implication is that the demographic variables do not significantly influence respondents' perceptions. This finding is very insightful because it shows that the respondents' perceptions of the research problem are not influenced or distorted by any of the examined demographic characteristics. Consequently, the respondents are well-informed about the research problem, regardless of the demographic subgroup to which they belong.

Table 8. Test of hypotheses

Number	Hypothesis	Accept/Reject
H_01	There is a significant relationship between public bodies' grant provision and the sustainability of SMTEs in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa.	Do not Reject
H_02	There is a significant relationship between funding by public bodies and the sustainability of SMTEs in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa.	Reject
H_03	There is a significant relationship between public bodies' provision of rebates and the sustainability of SMTEs in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa.	Reject
H_04	There is a significant relationship between the provision of adequate infrastructure and the sustainability of SMTEs in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa	Reject
H_05	A significant relationship exists between the provision of recreational facilities and the sustainability of SMTEs in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa.	Reject
H_06	There is a significant relationship between the respondents' perception of public bodies' support for the sustainability of SMTEs and gender.	Do not reject
H_07	There is a significant relationship between the respondents' perception of public bodies' support for the sustainability of SMTEs and age group.	Do not reject
H_08	There is a significant relationship between the respondents' perception of public bodies' support for the sustainability of SMTEs and their occupation.	Do not reject

7. Conclusions and Recommendations for Future Studies

This study examines the role of public bodies in supporting SMTEs. The authors acknowledge that the involvement of public entities in strengthening the capacity and resilience of SMTEs is becoming increasingly critical in today's economic environment. SMTEs comprise a substantial portion of the tourism industry, accounting for over 80% of business activity in many regions. Their growth fosters local economic development, encourages cultural exchange, and promotes innovation within communities. Public bodies play a vital role in facilitating this growth through strategic actions such as providing financial support, developing policies, and offering resources essential to the sustainability of these businesses. The research was conducted with the understanding that, although multiple studies have explored the topic, a significant gap exists regarding the role of public bodies in promoting the sustainability of SMTEs, particularly in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa.

A quantitative approach was used, involving a cross-sectional survey of 160 respondents, SMTE owners in the Eastern Cape, to gather insights from key stakeholders knowledgeable about SMTE ownership in the region. To ensure the instrument accurately measured what it was intended to measure, the study tested its validity using the content validity index. A pilot survey was conducted with 45 respondents from a population different from that of the main sample. Based on this pilot, the content validity index for the entire instrument and individual items was calculated. The validity indices ranged from 0.79 to 0.81 for the overall instrument and for the scales POG, GF, POR, POAI, PORF, and SOTSMEs, respectively. All coefficients exceeded or closely approached the 0.78 threshold, confirming the instrument's validity. The study tested eight hypotheses, of which four were rejected, and four were supported.

This study was based in one of the nine provinces in South Africa. The study used a quantitative research approach and a questionnaire to collect data from respondents. Respectively, it is recommended that future studies be based on other South African provinces and employ either a qualitative or a mixed-methods approach to gain insights from interviews, which typically provide rich descriptions of participants' narratives.

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