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Planning Urban Regeneration through Heritage Tourism: The Case of Kliptown, South Africa²

ABSTRACT

Literature on heritage tourism planning in sub-Saharan Africa is underdeveloped. The aim in this paper is to investigate one highly significant heritage site, which is located in metropolitan Johannesburg, South Africa’s leading urban tourism destination. The specific focus is on Kliptown, a township of modern Soweto, situated 25 km south-west of Johannesburg city centre. In South African history, Kliptown is important in the anti-apartheid struggle for hosting the 1955 Congress of the People and the signing of the Freedom Charter. The planning of Kliptown as a destination for heritage tourism and its local impacts for physical area regeneration are analysed. It is demonstrated that at Kliptown, as has been the case with several other heritage tourism projects implemented during the post-apartheid period, the promised developmental effects for local communities have not materialised.

Keywords: heritage planning, Johannesburg, South Africa, urban heritage tourism

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² Thanks for the comments from two reviewers and the valued inputs to this paper provided by Robbie Norfolk, Lulu White and Skye Norfolk. Dr J. Gregory, University of Pretoria, is credited for the photograph. Arno Booyzen prepared the map.
INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades the role of the tourism sector has become critical for place-based development planning across South Africa (Rogerson, 2014; Nel & Rogerson, 2016). Several studies attest that tourism has emerged as a leading focus for local economic development programming in the country (Donaldson, 2018; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2019; Visser, 2019). Indeed, since 2000, amidst worsening levels of unemployment across South Africa, the majority of local governments have pivoted to tourism as a driver for local economic growth, job creation and small enterprise development (Nel & Rogerson, 2016; Rogerson, 2020a). Although tourism in South Africa is often associated with rural areas and nature tourism, the most important spaces for tourism development are in the country’s leading cities such as Cape Town, Durban and Johannesburg (Rogerson, 2013; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2014, 2017, 2021a, 2021b). Renewed opportunities opened for urban tourism development in post-apartheid South Africa as a result of the establishment of new heritage sites, museums and commemorative memorials, which were part of the re-assessment and the commodification of “heritage” (Rogerson, 2002; Marschall, 2009; Murray, 2013).

After the end of apartheid, Roux (2021) points to a boom in new heritage and commemorative projects in South Africa. Further, as is stressed by Marschall (2005), with the end of sanctions and South Africa re-joining the international tourism economy there existed great optimism in the first decade of democracy about the seemingly unlimited potential for heritage tourism projects. Hlongwane and Ndlovu (2019, p. 20) point out that politicians, civil society formations and government officials perceived “heritage or ‘struggle’ tourism as a strategy for job creation and national as well as local economic development”. Certain of these post-apartheid projects have emerged as popular tourist attractions, the most well-known being Robben Island in Cape Town, which was declared a UNESCO heritage site (van der Merwe, 2019a). As the celebration of heritage memories became a business and development opportunity, one essential component of developing urban tourism in South Africa has been the planning (and management) of heritage assets for boosting urban heritage tourism.

The aim in this paper is to investigate the planning of one highly significant heritage site which is situated in metropolitan Johannesburg, South Africa’s leading urban tourism destination as indexed by tourism trips (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2014, 2017, 2021b). The specific focus is on Kliptown, which is a township of Soweto, located 25 km south-west of Johannesburg city centre. In terms of modern South African history, Kliptown is celebrated for its place in the anti-apartheid struggle (Bremner, 2004; Noble, 2008; Kuljian, 2009). It was the location for the Congress of the People and the signing of the Freedom Charter in 1955 (Congress of People, 1955). This document represented a historic declaration of fundamental freedoms and human rights and has become the liberation manifesto of the African National Congress (Suttner & Cronin, 2006). As observed by Judin et al. (2014, p. 319), with the collapse of the apartheid regime in the 1990s “it seemed obvious that the site where this event had taken place should be officially commemorated along with many other sites, stories and public memories connected to the anti-apartheid struggle”. The planning of Kliptown as a destination for heritage tourism and local area regeneration is the central focus of this article. The research is situated
as a contribution to a broader scholarship on heritage tourism in sub-Saharan Africa and in particular in South Africa.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

In the view of Bhowmik (2021, p. 387), “heritage tourism is a rapidly growing, specialized genre of tourism”. Pentz and Albert (2023, p. 2) view it “among the most dynamically developing types of tourism products around the world”. According to Light (2015, p. 153) heritage tourism represents “one of the most significant forms of special interest tourism around the globe, and almost all countries use their past in some way for domestic and/or international tourism”. As a result of its socio-economic significance heritage has become one of the most pervasive and salient resources for tourism in many parts of the world (Timothy, 2020). Nevertheless, the definition of what is “heritage” is problematic, with at least one observer describing the concept of heritage as “a vexing issue” (Visser, 2023, p. 105). Indeed, the concept is contested with varying definitions and practices in different parts of the world (Timothy & Boyd, 2003; Lwoga & Adu-Ampong, 2020).

Waterton and Watson (2015, p. 1) define heritage as “a version of the past received through objects and display, representation and engagements, spectacular locations and events, memories and commemorations, and the preparation of places for cultural purposes and consumption.” Heritage can include both tangible aspects (buildings, monuments, historic sites) as well as intangible aspects (traditions and customs) but always involves a valued inheritance from the past which is utilized in the present with aspirations to pass on to future generations (Timothy & Prideaux, 2004; Timothy & Boyd, 2006; Timothy, 2014; Light, 2015; Timothy, 2020). In recent works, Timothy (2021a, 2021b) draws our attention to an important trend in the Global North, which is towards the “democratisation” of heritage. This involves moving beyond the extraordinary, exotic and grand heritage assets to include ordinary, mundane elements of the human past, which are part of the everyday lives of ordinary people. Overall, Timothy (2023, p. 1) regards the concept of heritage now “as multidimensional, complex and exceptionally inclusive”.

Arguably, the phenomenon of heritage tourism represents one of the oldest forms of tourism (Light, 2015). It is an umbrella term that demarcates the use of a product category which involves heritage products, built or intangible, and which in many situations has been modified over time (Timothy & Boyd, 2003; Lwoga & Adu-Ampong, 2020; Boyd, 2021). It is evident that heritage tourism represents one of the most pervasive forms of contemporary tourism today (Timothy, 2018a). For Timothy (2018b, p. 177), heritage tourism “has become a buzzword in the travel industry and within the research academy” and elsewhere. Light (2015, p. 145) styles heritage tourism as “a fluid concept that has a range of different meanings in different contexts”. In all settings, however, it involves the use of the past as a tourism asset, albeit, as stressed by Gravari-Barbas (2020), with sometimes blurred intersections of heritage and tourism. It is argued by Timothy (2014) that tourists’ interest in and consumption of the past helps bolster the identity of destination communities and empower them by deeming their patrimony important and worthwhile. In addition, the use of the past by tourism
can be a vital catalyst for employment opportunities, a boost for local incomes and government tax revenues. It can also be a solid foundation for the physical regeneration of declining urban spaces (Lak et al., 2020; Wise & Jimura, 2020). Therefore, heritage tourism anchored on the utilization of historic resources constitutes the essential foundation for the tourism economies of many destinations. It is argued that cities are important locations for this form of tourism because of the heritage and culture they contain. As emphasized in several works by Timothy (2014, 2018a, 2018b, 2020), heritage tourism must be acknowledged as one of the most ubiquitous forms of tourism and a developmental tool in countless destinations. Rogerson (2019) pinpoints that heritage tourism is a critical element of place-based local economic development programming in many countries. Visser (2023, p. 104) notes that the niche of heritage tourism “is considered a tool with the potential to promote local development opportunities in the Global South”. This confirms the results of a major survey of tourism in cities of the Global South where the niche of heritage tourism was isolated as important for many destinations (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2021c).

Despite its economic and social significance, Timothy (2018b, p. 177) reflects that heritage tourism “was only acknowledged, defined and researched in the mainstream as recently as the 1980s with a rapid rise in academic interest in the 1990s”. Initial issues of scholarly research scrutiny included defining heritage resources, descriptions of visitor experiences, the supply of heritage assets, and research on market demand for heritage products (Timothy & Boyd, 2006). Other investigations focused on such themes as the politics of heritage, heritage impacts, the authenticity of heritage experiences and the relationship of heritage tourism to national identity (Light, 2015). In addition, there emerged an expanding allied literature around “dark tourism” which involves visits to sites such as prisons, slave centres, war zones or places of atrocity. As maximising the local development benefits must be a policy priority for heritage tourism destinations, the planning and management of heritage sites remains a critical research issue (Timothy & Prideaux, 2004; Timothy & Boyd, 2006) and most especially in the context of the Global South (Timothy & Nyaupane, 2009; Timothy, 2023a, 2023b). The largest amount of research on heritage tourism, however, is produced in the Global North. Among others Visser (2023, p. 104) asserts that relative to literature on the Global North “the impacts of heritage tourism in the Global South have seen modest scholarly examination”. Overall, whilst cities are places strongly associated with heritage and culture, Boyd (2021) maintains that the city has not been a setting that has evoked major attention by heritage tourism scholars.

In the specific context of the Global South it is evident that heritage tourism represents an increasingly significant driver of tourism for many destinations and in both rural and urban settings (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2018; Lwoga & Adu-Ampong, 2020; Timothy, 2023b; Visser, 2023). Nevertheless, in an early assessment the overall picture was viewed by Timothy & Nyaupane (2009, p. 249) that in many instances “developing countries are very rich in heritage; however the linkage between heritage and tourism is weak”. This viewpoint has been reiterated recently that whilst “Africa has a great deal of heritage tourism potential, only a handful of countries have tapped into this lucrative area of tourism” (Timothy, 2023a, p. 18). Several negative physical and socio-cultural ramifications of heritage tourism developments in the Global South were highlighted by both Timothy and Nyaupane (2009) and by Lwoga and Kessy (2013). These authors underline various dangers of deterioration to
the built environment, problems around conservation and preservation of heritage, and of cultural commodification. In the experience of Indonesia Hampton (2005) analyses the benefits and costs of local heritage sites, and Syafrini et al. (2020, 2022) document the positive re-invention of a former coal mining city into a cultured mining heritage destination.

As a whole, sub-Saharan Africa is a region of the Global South where “heritage tourism has not received academic attention commensurate with its importance, despite its richness, variety and diversity” (Timothy, 2023b, p. 304). The maximization of this region’s assets for cultural heritage including colonial and indigenous tangible and intangible heritage is becoming increasingly relevant for the African tourism product mix (Lwoga & Adu-Ampong, 2020). Timothy (2023b, p. 304) considers that the promotion and development of heritage tourism in Africa “has so much potential for sustainable tourism growth into the future to help alleviate poverty and protect the tangible and intangible patrimony of the entire continent”.

However, as evidenced by one bibliometric overview, the region of sub-Saharan Africa has only a minor footprint in international scholarship about heritage tourism (Kumar et al., 2020). This study confirms the earlier reported assessment undertaken by Lwoga and Kessy (2013) that heritage tourism research is underdeveloped and most especially in urban sub-Saharan Africa. The most recent overview undertaken by Visser (2023, p. 104) concluded that “the extant scholarship on heritage tourism in Africa, and Sub-Saharan Africa specifically, is sparse, very uneven in spatial focus and type”. Of note is that Chirikure et al. (2021) provide a valuable analysis of the relationship between UNESCO and the development of heritage tourism within Africa. Other useful research contributions must be acknowledged, such as on heritage tourism issues in Ghana (Adu-Ampong, 2012; Mensah, 2015) and Tanzania (Lwoga, 2017, 2018a, 2018b, 2019).

Currently, the most extensive body of writings on heritage tourism is that for South Africa with particularly notable works contributed by Baines (2019), Hlongwane and Ndlovu (2019), McEwen (2013), Marschall (2005, 2009, 2013, 2019), Mgxekwa et al. (2017, 2019), Murray (2013), Rassool (2000) and Roux (2021). In addition, there has been a recent burst of contributions on heritage tourism which have been authored by geographers, most especially the geography of heritage studies produced by van der Merwe and colleagues. Arguably, these research investigations have established an important position for geographers in scholarly debates which are taking place around leveraging South Africa’s assets for heritage tourism development (van der Merwe, 2013; van der Merwe & Rogerson, 2013; Khumalo et al., 2014; van der Merwe, 2014; Masilo & van der Merwe, 2016; Rogerson & van der Merwe, 2016; van der Merwe, 2016; van der Merwe & Rogerson, 2018; van der Merwe, 2019a, 2019b; Mohale et al., 2020; Drummond et al., 2021; van der Merwe, 2024). In a recent overview of tourism geographical writings for South Africa it was concluded that the theme of heritage tourism was attracting “several recent contributions variously about its participants, its geographies and its economic impacts” (Rogerson & Visser, 2020, p. 6).
METHODS

The data used in this study on the planning of heritage tourism development at Kliptown were obtained from both primary and secondary sources. The primary information was gathered through archival searches including at the collections of historical papers of the University of the Witwatersrand (Johannesburg) and the records (including unpublished consultancy reports) of the Johannesburg Development Agency, the implementation agency responsible for the development and upgrading of the Kliptown project area. More recent material on the project area was sourced from the South African Heritage Resource Agency. An internet-mediated search captured material from a range of secondary sources, including published literature and unpublished research dissertations. Figure 1 shows the location of Kliptown, one of the settlements that comprise the vast township of Soweto. Of note is that this heritage tourism development is located 15 km from Vilakazi Street and the Hector Pieterson Memorial and Museum. These are the core attractions for the majority of “township” tours operated in Soweto and which are mainly patronised by international tourists (see Booyens, 2021).

RESULTS

The Kliptown area has a distinctive development history as a township in Johannesburg (Johannesburg Development Agency, 2014a). Howe (2022) views the settlement founded in 1903 as an early example of “toehold urbanization”, which is interpreted as people simply “getting a foot in the door” in terms
of access to employment opportunities in major urban areas. In Johannesburg toehold urbanization emerged to serve the mining-industrial complex. Kliptown became a melting pot for diverse cultural and racial groups accessing the growing mining city (Newbury, 2011). Until 1970, the settlement was outside the Johannesburg city boundaries and from the early 1900s consolidated as a place to house the unwanted and marginalized populations that came to Johannesburg seeking work on the mines (Judin et al., 2014). In terms of colonial legislation, Africans were prohibited from owning land outside the areas designated as “native reserves”. Situated beyond the municipal boundaries Kliptown, however, was a freehold area and one of the few places where Africans in urban areas of South Africa might own property (Newbury, 2011). In addition, it was one of the few spaces where “non-Europeans” could engage in trade or own businesses (Bremner, 2004).

Kliptown was a mixed or hybrid urban space, a place where different racial groups lived together (Judin et al., 2014). Bremner (2004, p. 523) records that the way Johannesburg authorities responded to the undisciplined and marginal activities taking place in Kliptown “was simply to ignore it”. As a result of the area’s unique history and location by 1955, when the committee for the Congress of the People, an alliance of anti-apartheid groupings, was in search of a venue that might host a public non-racial gathering, there were few better locations (Kuljian, 2009). Kliptown was selected because it was geographically beyond municipal jurisdiction, accessible to a train station, and with a large tract of land sufficient to accommodate the expected thousands of attendees for the planned protest event (Bremner, 2004). On 25–26 June 1955 almost 3000 delegates and 7000 spectators from all over South Africa converged on Kliptown to ratify the Freedom Charter document, which had been in preparation for two years (Congress of People, 1955; Suttner & Cronin, 2006). Nevertheless, as observed by Noble (2008), the site of this thoroughly inclusive event in South African history was an area that had suffered a long history of neglect in terms of its high levels of unemployment, poor conditions of housing and infrastructural shortcomings.

Unsurprisingly, Kliptown was not included in the itinerary of the earliest guided tours offered to the townships of Soweto. The tours that began in the late 1960s were organised by the Johannesburg City Council and sought to showcase to visitors the “model” housing programmes which had been established there by apartheid planning (Rogerson, 2021). Booyens (2021) aptly styles these early township tours as “propaganda tourism”. In terms of tourism under apartheid the major distinguishing feature of Kliptown was that it hosted the “New Yorker” hotel, one of the small number of “non-White” hotels established in urban areas of apartheid South Africa as a result of the introduction of legislation requiring racially segregated hotel spaces (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2020; Rogerson, 2020b). According to information provided in the annual survey of race relations produced by the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR), the hotel opened to visitors in 1959 (Horrell, 1959, p. 248). In the 1967 guide to Johannesburg specifically produced by SAIRR for Africans the New York was described as offering “seven bedrooms and one bathroom”, catering for all designated “Non-Whites – African, Coloured and Indian” people, and that management arranged dances and social evenings “for every Thursday and Friday night” (Suttner, 1967, p. 2).

Arguably, throughout the apartheid period (1948–1991) little was done to address the Kliptown community’s woeful living environment and the shelter conditions in the area worsened with an
extension of informal settlement. After the democratic transition the dilapidated state of the physical environment of Kliptown precipitated protests with residents’ anger over the lack of services (Judin et al., 2014). The critical need for the area’s economic regeneration only emerged belatedly on the agenda of Johannesburg metropolitan authorities in the late 1990s. Importantly, this occurred at a moment when great optimism surrounded the prospects of planned post-apartheid heritage projects emerging as popular tourist attractions (Marschall, 2005). As stressed by Kuljian (2009), the 1996 Greater Kliptown Development Framework began with good intentions. At the heart of this development programme for upgrading Kliptown, including the de-densifying and upgrading of informal housing, were proposals for establishing what was then called Freedom Square, the site of the 1955 Congress of the People, as a tourism site with a museum and enhanced public spaces. Implementation of this plan, however, did not materialise largely because of the absence of capacity within the municipality to handle an area-wide development project of this scale (Judin et al., 2014). According to Kuljian (2009, p. 457), it was five years later “before the political will, institutional capacity and funding came together to revisit Kliptown and initiate another plan”. Of critical importance was the establishment of the Johannesburg Development Agency (JDA) to organise area-based economic development initiatives in the metropolitan area. Its funding came from both the city and the Gauteng provincial government through the resources of Blue IQ, the provincial development agency (Johannesburg Development Agency, 2014a).

It was announced in 2002 that massive investments would be committed to the renewal of Kliptown and that the area would be among a list of high priority projects. Arguably, its selection was as a result of city officials accepting that heritage tourism could significantly boost urban economic development prospects and drive the Kliptown area’s urgently needed physical regeneration (Judin et al., 2014). Once again at the core of the redevelopment proposals was the creation of a monument to commemorate the Freedom Charter with a target for completion for the 50th anniversary of the adoption of the Charter – 26 June 2005. An architectural competition was launched for the redesign of the space in the environs of the Square (Johannesburg Development Agency, 2010). The object was both to address a range of community needs around housing as well as to attract international tourists to this critical heritage space of the anti-apartheid struggle. This said, as has been stressed by several observers, following the selection of the winning design and the commencement of implementation “attention to the preferences and practices of local residents declined and the emphasis on attracting tourists increased” (Kuljian, 2009, p. 457).

For the Johannesburg Development Agency (2014b) Kliptown remained “a place of hope”. Nevertheless, the trajectory of the development process, designed and controlled externally and without much attention to local community preferences, became top-down driven and imposed on the local community (Bremner, 2004; Noble, 2008). By 2002 Freedom Square had been renamed the Walter Sisulu Square of Dedication to honour a former leader of the African National Congress. This renaming decision was widely felt to be hasty and inappropriate by many observers, as for the local community the chief significance of the Square was about the Freedom Charter and had very little to do with Walter Sisulu (Kuljian, 2007). Local residents were angered when government officials decided to rename what was to be called “Freedom Square” to “Walter Sisulu Square of Dedication” without any
community consultation (Kuljian, 2009; Judin et al., 2014). Further community disenchantment with the project implementation arose from the forced relocation of informal traders and with minimal attention to how the new facilities on the Square would be used or managed (Kuljian, 2009).

At its centre is the memorial to the Freedom Charter housed in a conical tower where the words of the Charter are carved on a concrete wheel surrounding a commemorative flame (Judin et al., 2014). Among others Noble (2008) stresses that the monumental scale of the new Square has not been well-received and not least because over one-third of the budget committed for Kliptown redevelopment and completed in 2005 was expended on the Square as a foundation for heritage tourism. The construction of the monument to mark the site where the Freedom Charter was adopted “was brought to a standstill several times by community protests over the non-delivery of housing” (Marschall, 2019, p. 1097). Figure 2 shows the hugeness of the Square, its neat and clean empty spaces devoid of people. What was created was a large characterless authoritarian space, which as a consequence is often unused, empty and soulless. One observer was prompted to describe it as an “out-of-time” monumental architectural and planning ensemble “which looks very much like something Nehru’s India or Kubitschek’s Brazil might have built in the 1950s or early 1960s” (Murawski, 2019, p. 26).

Figure 2. The Walter Sisulu Square of Dedication

Following the opening of the site in 2005 there has occurred the addition of further structures to support the Kliptown precinct and integrate it as part of the diversified township tourism product in Soweto (Booyens, 2021). These include a struggle heritage museum and a four-star boutique hotel with a conference centre. The anchor project documents produced to inform tourism development in Kliptown were overly optimistic in projections for the likely growth of numbers in international heritage tourists (see Ochre Communications, 2004). Five years after project completion the planning documents were anticipating nearly 200 000 international visitors annually to the site. Notwithstanding-
ing the hopes of the Johannesburg Development Agency for increased tourism flows to Kliptown and tourism-led regeneration, the heritage tourism project has not resulted in a major upturn in tourism flows or in any radical improvement in the conditions of local infrastructure and the livelihoods of Kliptown residents. Despite the construction of the boutique hotel, which attracts mainly government and corporate events but only limited occupancy by international tourists, the much anticipated tourism spend and multiplier effects from this investment in heritage tourism simply have not materialized.

The above assessment is confirmed by the results of several other studies completed on tourism in the Kliptown area and of its local impacts in the period just prior to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic (Morgan, 2017; Ray, 2018). For example, Muhadi (2019, p. 49) speaks of the fact that “the current number of tourists is low” and explains that in part to the lack of involvement of the local community in projects for Kliptown development. Ray’s (2018, p. 73) interviews with heritage stakeholders pointed to a conclusion that the Square was “not working as a tourism site”. It is evident that the city of Johannesburg’s desired targets for heritage tourists remain far from being realised and that the “precinct continues to struggle with regards to the number of tourists” (Muhadi, 2019, p. 49). Although precise tourism numbers are unavailable in Ray’s (2017) stakeholder interviews undertaken around the Kliptown project, it was reported by one heritage analyst that annual visitor numbers for the museum on the square might be as low as 4000 in total! In order to boost Kliptown tourism the stakeholder interviews pointed to the imperative for improved marketing of the precinct and most especially as compared to the much greater marketing attention accorded to the Vilakazi Street area and cluster of tourist attractions of Soweto (Ray, 2018). Another compelling challenge is, however, to address the bad state of the surrounding environment as regards basic infrastructure services, water and sanitation (Morgan, 2017). Notwithstanding these issues, in 2019 the Walter Sisulu Square of Dedication was declared as a national heritage site. It was identified as one of ten initial sites for the Human Rights and Reconciliation: Nelson Mandela Legacy Sites World Heritage nomination (Heritage Protection Unit, South African Heritage Resources Agency, 2019).

Significantly at the public meeting convened to discuss the World Heritage nomination process whilst community members did not oppose the declaration of the site, it was observed that “they were weary of further developments at the site while their living conditions and socio-economic situations were not considered” (Heritage Protection Unit, South African Heritage Resources Agency, 2019, p. 7). What is abundantly clear from recent research is the minimal contribution which has been made by this heritage tourism project towards uplifting the livelihoods and dire socio-economic conditions of Kliptown local residents. On several occasions since the early 2000s, the Kliptown community has been promised improved living conditions and job opportunities but these have not been fulfilled despite the community making clear that the area’s heritage assets “should be used to uplift the living conditions of the people of Kliptown” (Muhadi, 2019, p. 47). Recent studies suggest that in Kliptown unemployment rates are between 60–70 percent, with 85 percent of the community living in informal housing and enduring a sanitation system dependent largely on the bucket system and chemical toilets, and with minimal public services (Lekaba, 2020). In a 2019 report produced by an agency of national government on the state of Kliptown heritage and tourism it was concluded as follows:
Despite the aims and predictions, the business plans, the community of Kliptown have yet to realize any benefits from the proposed developments. The community of Kliptown have endured many years of neglect despite the many promises made through the project, politicians and government. The lack of service delivery, increased unemployment and lowering levels of disposable income persist for the people of Kliptown (Heritage Protection Unit, South African Heritage Resources Agency, 2019, p. 2).

Overall, while local communities might not always directly benefit from flows of heritage tourists, arguably the planning of such initiatives should “include some general upgrading of the surrounding area or become nodes of urban development” (Marschall, 2005, p. 111). This was supposedly to occur at Kliptown where the planned monument of commemoration at the Walter Sisulu Square of Dedication would “not only form a new ‘town centre’, but constitute the focal point of a substantial urban renewal project for the entire surrounding area, which includes new roads, homes and public facilities” (Marschall, 2005, p. 111). It is evidenced that at Kliptown, as has been the case with several other heritage tourism projects implemented in the post-apartheid period, the promised developmental effects for local communities have not materialised (Marschall, 2019).

CONCLUSIONS

For the leading international geographical scholar on heritage tourism “there remains a dearth of knowledge about the dynamics of heritage tourism” in sub-Saharan Africa (Timothy, 2023b, p. 304). The pursuit of such research is particularly justified given the continued flow of new heritage-related tourism developments in this region of the global tourism economy. This article contributes to the paucity of studies which have interrogated the planning of urban heritage tourism in Africa. In the assessment by Visser (2023, p. 113) it was argued that generally across the experience of sub-Saharan Africa “urban heritage tourism is not reaching its full potential”. From a socio-political perspective, Marschall (2009) points out that for previously marginalized communities the celebration of heritage can be empowering. That said, the construction of new heritage projects can be divisive in that their value as tourist attractions and generators of local incomes may on closer examination be much lower than local communities are made to believe” (p. 121). Indeed, it is argued, “one suspects that the tourism argument is sometimes mobilized to justify commemorative projects that are rather politically expedient” (Marschall, 2009, p. 121).

This would appear to be the case at least in the initial planning and rollout of the heritage tourism project in Kliptown. The evidence from Kliptown further confirms the evaluations of other heritage scholars that the government’s belief that the people would “proudly embrace and protect ‘their heritage’ has – by and large – not materialized” (Marschall, 2019, p. 1096). In South Africa, abundant research attests that residents in townships rarely visit local heritage sites, show a lack of interest in history or heritage conservation, and seemingly have no genuine sense of ownership of heritage assets (Marschall, 2013; Ray, 2018). Local communities reject or ignore local monuments as a result of disgruntlement often over issues of inadequate consultation. An equally compelling reason for local communities to reject heritage projects relates to cost considerations with residents viewing
them as a waste of scarce resources in contexts where many people lack food, adequate shelter and basic services. At the implementation phase of heritage projects local communities often “make their approval conditional upon employment of locals and simultaneous delivery of housing and other basic needs” (Marschall, 2019, p. 1096). Nevertheless, in South Africa the post-apartheid government has moved more swiftly with the construction of commemorative monuments than with the completion of desperately needed community infrastructure. In final analysis the experience of Kliptown provides an important lesson for planners of urban tourism heritage projects. The building of monuments and the development of heritage tourism attractions in spaces where there are serious socio-economic challenges without the implementation of measures to address poverty, service delivery shortcomings and chronic unemployment poses the danger that such monuments and heritage sites can become focal points for broader dissatisfaction by communities.

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