

Tourism gentrification in Cape Town's Bo-Kaap: Socio-economic transformations and displacement

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Abstract. Tourism gentrification is attracting a growing literature in the urban Global North but as yet has received only limited attention in Southern cities. The novel contribution of this paper is to analyse the impact of tourism gentrification on the inner-city heritage precinct of the Bo-Kaap neighbourhood in Cape Town, South Africa. The growth of tourism gentrification is one consequence of the post-apartheid emergence of Cape Town as a leading destination for international tourism. This analysis seeks to understand the effects, the dual processes of tourism and urban redevelopment have on its residents and highlights the challenges facing heritage rich communities in a post-colonial, developing-world context. The results show that whilst tourism presents several opportunities for economic prosperity and cultural preservation, it is not being effectively leveraged for its transformative potential. Arguably, local planning can be criticised for being anaemic and incoherent and that the management of the tourism sector is largely absent. Current conditions can be described as chaotic, with residents experiencing many of the hallmarks of overtourism. The study is based on analysis of various interest groups, 22 semi-structured interviews, supported by a historical study, policy document analysis, participant observation and social media content analysis.

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1. Introduction

The Bo-Kaap is a historic inner-city neighbourhood situated above the linear city grid on the slopes of Cape Town's Table Mountain (Fig 1). Distinguished by its vibrant coloured houses, anachronistic cobblestone streets, and demonstrable socio-religious culture, the neighbourhood is Cape Town's foremost cultural asset. The area is considered the cradle of Islam in South Africa and hosts several notable places of worship and reverence (Davids, 1980; Morton 2018). Fusing Cape Dutch traditions and Georgian styles in a particularly successful way, the settlement contains the largest concentration of pre-1850s colonial architecture in South Africa making an important contribution to the country's architectural heritage (Townsend & Townsend, 1977; Pistorius, 1998; Stevens, 2014; Todeschini, 2017). The aesthetically pleasing and culturally rich neighbourhood represents slave and struggle narratives.

Historically, the brutal practice of chattel slavery at the Cape, occurred for 180 years from 1658 to 1838, supporting the Dutch East India Company's rising

prominence in a colonising world (Worden 2012). Upon the emancipation of slaves, a large proportion of the 38 000 colony's slaves migrated to the Cape and many freed slaves moved into unoccupied parts of the Bo-Kaap. Over time, exotic Eastern customs and traditions mingled with those of the Dutch and other slaves to form a new culture which came to be styled as 'Cape Malay' (Wilkinson & Kragolsen-Kille, 2006). The emergence of a distinct Creole culture, Cape Malay cuisine and music and various elements of material and religious expression continue to be vividly reflected in everyday community life, serving as powerful conduits for the reclamation of memory (Baderoon, 2014). Under apartheid policies of imposed racial segregation, large-scale forced removals occurred of the majority 'non-White' population from South Africa's inner-city urban spaces (Rogerson, 2025). One exception was Cape Town's Bo-Kaap which was officially declared a 'Malay Group Area' on 21 June 1957 and became one of the few inner-city spaces of South Africa that allowed 'non-White' residence.



Fig. 1. Bo-Kaap on the slopes of Table Mountain

Source: credit, Sirhan Jessa

Under apartheid from 1948-1991 the tourism economy of Cape Town was oriented around domestic travellers as the flows of international tourists were limited by boycotts and sanctions on South Africa because of the government's policies of racial discrimination (Rogerson, 2017; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2020, 2025). South Africa's democratic transition in 1994 allowed the country's re-entry into the international tourism economy and catalysed a significant demand as a tourist destination (Visser & Rogerson, 2004). With its natural beauty and waterfront re-developments post-1994 Cape Town emerged as an iconic destination for international tourists and the most important centre for tourism spend in South Africa (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2014, 2017, 2022; Chetty & Visser, 2025). As the city's major cultural asset the Bo-Kaap has experienced major transformations which have been associated with Cape Town's ascent as an urban tourism destination (Fig. 2). The advance of gentrification in the Bo-Kaap has been well-documented in both academic and contemporary discourses (Kotze & Van der Merwe, 2000; Visser, 2002; Donaldson et

al, 2013; Kotze, 2013). In particular Kotze (2013) pinpointed the concerning gentrification impacts on the cultural and social fabric of the Bo-Kaap. Further, Todeschini (2017) documents the planning approval and community activism which resisted the construction of a 19-storey mixed-use development (The Paradigm), highlighting the physical and psychological displacement effects of what local Bo-Kaap residents refer to as the "monster building". Arguably, such large-scale developments disrupt the fine residential grain, sever the Bo-Kaap from the city fabric, cast shadows and critically place at risk such vital intangible cultural heritage as the adhan or call to prayer (City of Cape Town, 2021a).

2. Literature review

The effects of excessive tourism growth have been studied for over half a century (Koens et al., 2018; Milano et al., 2019a). Applying tourism theory which incorporates the complexity of the tourism system

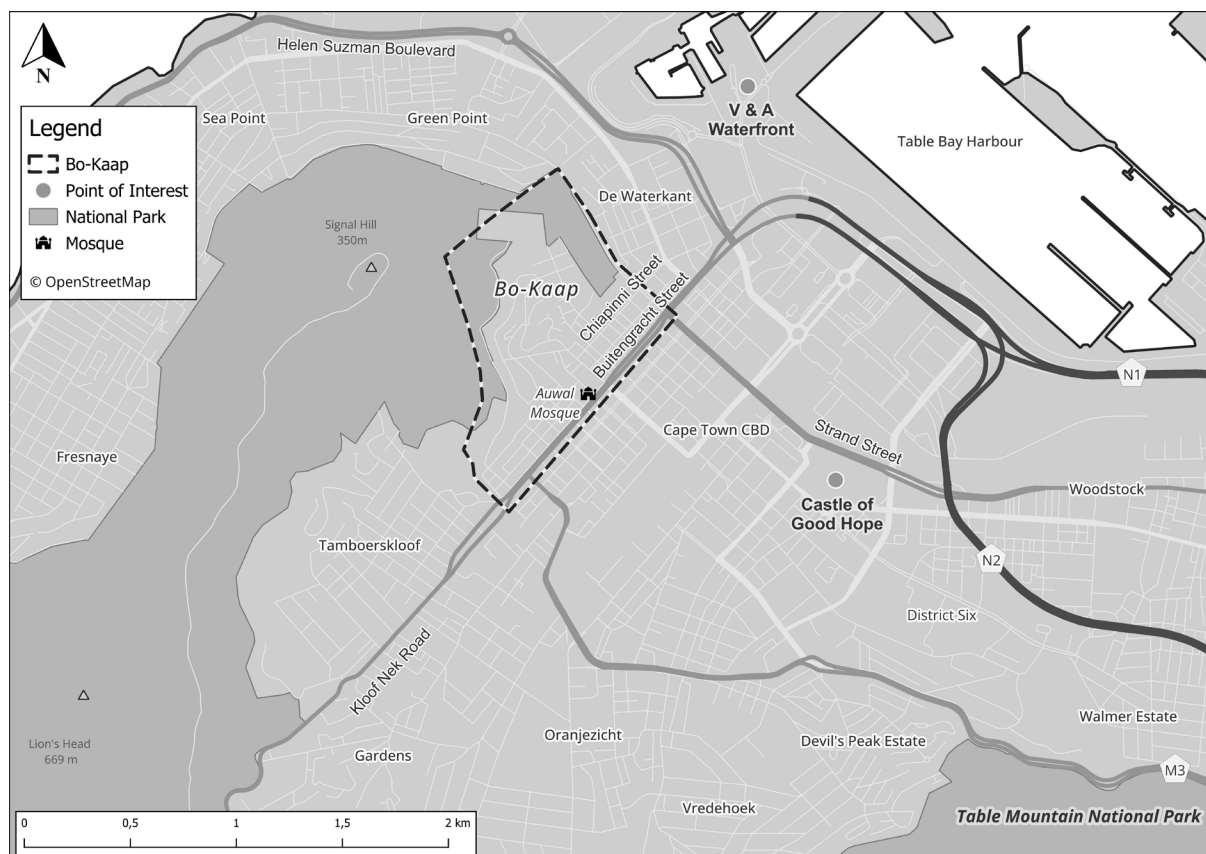


Fig. 2. Location map of Bo-Kaap

Source: Authors

is challenging. Arguably, tourism's theoretical base remains weak due to its complex economic, social, and cultural dimensions (Hall et al., 2004). Scholars call for a transdisciplinary approach, as tourism is often viewed as an external variable rather than an integral part of urban systems (Koens & Milano, 2024). Influential models like Doxey's (1975) irritation index explain how rising visitor numbers shift resident attitudes negatively (Moore, 2015). Butler's (1980) Tourism Area Life Cycle outlines a destination's evolution from slow growth to rapid development, stagnation, and decline or possible rejuvenation. Traditional stage-based models are, however, criticized for lacking dynamism and failing to fully explain shifts in tourism attitudes over time, structural changes or external shocks (Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2018).

Sustainable tourism development has become the dominant paradigm in global tourism and is widely referenced in strategic planning (Hardy et al., 2002; Torres-Delgado & Saarinen, 2014; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2020). It gained support by integrating free-market economics with environmental protection, replacing 'conservation' with 'sustainable growth,' appealing to corporations and neoliberal policymakers (Bianchi, 2004). Nevertheless, sustainable tourism development is criticized as ambiguous, difficult to implement, and ineffective in addressing overtourism (Butler, 1999; Ahn et al., 2002; Saarinen, 2006; Hall, 2019; Mihalic, 2020). For Ahn et al. (2000) sustainability requires usage limits, yet tourism's rapid expansion and niche markets often serve capitalist interests (Fletcher, 2011). Alternative tourism models, such as ecotourism, have been co-opted by neoliberalism, losing meaning (Giampiccoli & Mtapuri, 2020). Intensified product differentiation exacerbates competition and resource conflicts, while heritage and biodiversity-loss paradoxically enhance their desirability (Bianchi, 2004; Fletcher, 2011; Aall & Koens, 2019).

The phenomenon of 'overtourism' arises when tourism growth exceeds limits, causing resentment among residents and visitors. It is most studied in European cities, with limited research in the urban Global South (Milano et al., 2019a; Koens et al., 2021). Overtourism is linked to uncontrolled development, poor management, and tourism-induced negative impacts, particularly in fragile locations such as heritage sites (Koens et al., 2018; Bourliataux-Lajoie et al., 2019; Verrissimo et al., 2020; Mihalic, 2020). Overtourism mirrors gentrification, causing displacement, rising real estate prices, housing shortages and drives socio-spatial inequality (Aall & Koens, 2019; Morales-Pérez et al., 2022). The de-growth agenda challenges tourism's role in economic

prosperity (Milano et al., 2019b; Perkumiene & Pranskuniene, 2019). Strategies like 'Trexist' (exit from tourism) and the 5D approach (De-seasonality, Decongestion, Decentralization, Diversification, and Deluxe tourism) seek to mitigate overtourism, albeit structural shifts require strong governance and political will (Séraphin et al., 2018; Milano et al., 2019a; Capocchi et al., 2019).

The theory is now widely accepted that tourism has an impact on housing markets and neighbourhood life, while accelerating gentrification processes in popular urban cities (Cocola-Gant, 2018). The concept of tourism-driven urban transformation highlights how neoliberal economic systems exert displacement pressures beyond local control (Sager, 2011; Kesar et al., 2015). A neoliberalist perspective of tourism gentrification highlights the economic systems which exert displacement pressures and appear outside of the control of municipal planners and residents. Gravari-Barbas and Guinand (2020) explore "self-gentrification," where residents increasingly monetize their homes and culture through tourism, thereby reshaping urban spaces. Gotham (2005) coined the term 'tourism gentrification' to describe the transformation of New Orleans' French Quarter, where rising property values and tourism-oriented consumption altered residential life. The process results in touristification, embedding tourism in urban spaces and displacing working-class residents (Cocola-Gant, 2018; Cocola-Gant et al., 2020). Unquestionably tourism gentrification is a global strategy which leverages local identities for branding and profit, forcing residents to participate in urban commodification or bear socio-economic losses (Gotham, 2005; Cocola-Gant, 2018).

Tourism both follows and drives gentrification, creating mutually reinforcing cycles of urban change (Gravari-Barbas & Guinand, 2020). As Gotham (2005) points out, the global tourism supply chain's consumption of local culture, positions global financial circuits to redevelop residential and commercial space. As post-industrial cities increasingly turn to tourism for economic survival, competition for investment fuels the development of cities as 'experiencescapes' (Koens & Milano, 2024). Further, as former working-class neighbourhoods enter the international real estate market, housing costs rise, and local consumption patterns shift to cater to affluent visitors, eroding traditional lifestyles (Cocola-Gant et al., 2020). The loss of communal spaces particularly affects vulnerable groups such as the elderly (Cocola-Gant, 2018). Several cities, including Barcelona, Lisbon and Hong Kong, now advocate for regulations to mitigate tourism-led displacement (Lo & McKercher, 2023).

Revolutionary technologies have compressed “space-time” (Harvey, 2005:26). Transforming tourism production and consumption, the sharing economy is an economic system driven by peer-to-peer interactions that diminish the value of permanent ownership (Visser et al., 2017; Gyimóthy et al., 2020). Defined as a socio-economic system enabling temporary access to underutilized assets via online platforms, the sharing economy promotes sustainability but relies on trust at near-zero marginal costs (O’Reagan & Choe, 2017; Wearing et al., 2019; Hati et al., 2021). The exponential growth of short-term rentals such as Airbnb has disrupted global housing markets, potentially creating “super gentrification” (Lees, 2003). European cities like Amsterdam and Barcelona have faced resident-led protests against STR-induced displacement (Perkumiene & Pranskuniene, 2019; Smith et al., 2019; Morales-Perez et al., 2020). Martin (2016: 149) describe the sharing economy as “neoliberalism on steroids” as cultural and private spaces are increasingly commercialized (O’Reagan & Choe, 2017). Airbnb’s integration with travel, excursions, and dining strengthens its market dominance. Recently, Airbnb has collaborated with local tourism authorities to attract digital nomads, promote long-term stays and responsible hosting, initiatives which have often provided the motivation for large-scale, inner-city developments, including in Cape Town (Visser et al., 2017; Guttentag, 2019).

3. Methodology

This qualitative study explores neighbourhood change in Cape Town’s Bo-Kaap through a review of urban tourism scholarship, semi-structured interviews, social media content analysis, and ethnographic field study. It was disclosed that the literature reflects a surge in urban tourism scholarship in European cultural and historic neighbourhoods but remains sparse in Global South contexts (Milano et al., 2019a; Koens et al., 2021; Walmsley et al., 2021; Horn & Visser, 2023).

Respondents were identified via purposeful sampling and semi-structured interviews tailored to each respondent’s area of expertise, offering insider perspectives on gentrification, overtourism, and heritage conservation (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010; Bless & Higson-Smith, 2000). Snowball sampling helped identify relevant key informants, often with intersecting roles, including residents and representatives of the longstanding activist Bo-Kaap Residents Association (BOKRA) and the recently formed Bo-Kaap Tourism Association. City officials,

tourism and heritage professionals and residents living within the tourism hub were among the participants. Thematic analysis was used to identify key areas across the dataset.

Field or ethnographic research also was employed over a six-month period. Chaperoned tour guiding services facilitated active engagement and a comprehensive understanding of the cultural and developmental dynamics at play (Welman et al., 2008). Immersion offered an insider perspective and sufficient time to validate findings, examine processes, events, and relationships. Tours were accompanied with detailed notetaking and photographs, while offering wider access to historical sites and cultural experiences. Social media content analysis provided further, unfiltered community perspectives on overtourism and gentrification.

The anti-tourism discourse expressed on the Facebook “Bo-Kaap” group, surged in November 2023. While acknowledging that the selected content may not fully capture the perspectives of all community segments, it served as a modern form of ‘word of mouth’ (Budi et al., 2017).

4. Results and discussions

The results and discussions are divided into two themes. First, the gentrification of the Bo-Kaap and its effects are presented. The transformation of the neighbourhood, geared to tourism (touristification), resultant over-tourism and displacement effects experienced are issues explored within the second theme.

4.1 Gentrification

The literature and empirical evidence is clear. Large-scale urban developments have caused irreparable damage to the modest and fine residential grain of the Bo-Kaap (Fig. 3). The founder of the Bo-Kaap Tourist Association elaborated as follows: “*High-rise developments dominate the skyline and sever the Bo-Kaap from the city, both functionally and visually create hard borders and blockages to access a city which we always had the right to enjoy.*”

The views of a BOCRA representative and of a youth activist are that poor economic conditions, coupled with significant debt levels make it difficult for residents to cope with rising inner-city rents, rates and property costs, leading ultimately to their exclusion from the housing market.



Fig. 3. High rise developments on the edge of Bo-Kaap

Source: credit, Sirhan Jessa

“If you look at the amount of developments, if you put more than R40-50 million of investment into an area of not more than 6000 people, what do you think is going to happen? The inequality is going to continue. Because the people haven't been taken with.”

“and then apart from the Bo-Kaap issues young people are fighting just fighting like general economic issues, nationwide issues such as unemployment, no electricity, your safety and now you still need to worry about keeping the community together but actually all you can really think about is trying to protect your family, so their rent and rates are too expensive.”

Favourable foreign currency exchanges makes the Bo-Kaap attractive for circuits of global capital accumulation, as a lucrative option for second homes, rental properties and commercial short term rentals.

“Every major currency in the world has got a good exchange against the currency of the Rand so you have a very good equity and return on your investment. All

the drivers are pinging, its prime. The rental return is 100%. There is no restriction on you. You have the situation where foreigners are buying up 5 houses at a time. It only takes a few short years for people's lives to be changed irreparably.” (Bo-Kaap Tourism Association representative).

“Residents are constantly under attack from agents, WhatsApping offers for houses which are not on the market. People are exhausted of having their guard up all the time.” (Local resident).

The City of Cape Town authorities abdicate imposing any sort of regulation, and highlight that the legal protection of private property rights supersedes any possible regulation. As pointed out by a heritage practitioner of the City of Cape Town: *“On the question of foreigners buying property- You can't regulate this because that would be discriminatory. It's a willing seller willing buyer at this point. We're still in a free market.”*

For many residents of the Bo-Kaap gentrification is experienced as economic displacement. Without inclusive economic policies, such as rate rebates and rental restrictions, several residents find the area increasingly unaffordable. In respect of the new large property developments in the area it was stated that *“Because gentrification for me is an economic displacement, there aren't processes and policies in place to take the people with you into the future development and economic prosperity... The community cannot afford to buy and purchase into these developments because it's a low to middle income community”* (BOCRA lawyer). Further evidenced is the fragmentation of social connections, especially for elderly groups.

Long standing requests to the city authorities to apply rebates on municipal taxes and the financial assistance to maintain heritage homes has not happened to date. Residents and community activists argue that the area contributes to the overall tourism economy and preservation is partially government's responsibility. Although city officials concur that rates rebates should be applied they could not provide an actionable plan.

“But you see we don't have a legislative framework like a rates rebate or something despite the value we bring into the city” (Bo-Kaap Ratepayers Association).

“Of course, there's some responsibility on government to contribute to the upkeep of heritage homes in the Bo-Kaap in some way. A child can see it. Even the beggar can see the missing element here. Is the city supposed to care about this, it's an important part of the city, it's part of their asset, isn't Cape Town Tourism supposed to care about this? Is it not part of what they sell? Then it's obvious.” (Bo-Kaap Tourism Association).

“Peoples rates and taxes should be subsidised, especially primary owners, even it's their children who inherit and perhaps earn below a certain pay scale, the city should assist these community members to stay. Once the property changes hands then it is justified that the rates go up so it's a slower transitional period.” (City of Cape Town Tourism Manager).

Todeschini (2017) and Shem-Tov (2020) argue that in the Bo-Kaap area influential property developers, decide where and what gets built. This view is supported by a City of Cape Town official.

“All I can say is that politics and religion is always secondary to making money. You also have Saudi investors in the Bo-Kaap. It's about property speculating

and this is the biggest threat to the Bo-Kaap. Whether it's open land or inherited property there are always guys who are going to be after this to manipulate the legal system, rezone land and get big developments in. Private property rights often trump collective sentiment. There is fierce competition for these sites which have potential for growth. This is a big problem these guys operate at the level of the mafia in many respects, coercion, pressure manipulation is all part of the game these days.”

4.2. Touristification

This theme centres on the unchecked growth of tourism and the resulting overtourism, evidenced by a sharp rise in visitor numbers that now exceed pre-COVID levels (Wesgro, 2024). Given that the Bo-Kaap was never designed for tourism there is visible frustration of residents and a surge of anti-tourist sentiment on social media (Fig. 4). One resident and a community activist stated that: *“Tourism is a mess the City doesn't want to acknowledge it”!*

Residents in the tourist hub of Bo-Kaap decry the daily stream of tourists (Fig. 3). The voices of two local residents are typical:

“I'm just trying to have a cup of tea on my stoep, and I've got a busload of Chinese and then a busload of German and then a bus load of Americans walking by making a noise. Why am I still living here?”

“I'm 86 years old this year Alhamdulillah, but I really can't take it anymore, I just can't take it. I'm so tired of it! All day from seven in the morning every day the tourists are so loud, and they come up on to my stoep to take photos. The tour vehicles come and park here and when I ask them to move, they are rude, they can see this is a narrow street and parking is reserved for residents. There is nothing I can do to stop them. I can't move, I'm too old and have a heart condition, I've been living here 50 years...”

The contentious nature of the relationship between tourism development and resident quality of life and wellbeing is thus highlighted. Nevertheless, city officials appear ambivalent towards the negative impacts of excessive tourism. The opposing positions of authorities and residents is evidenced as follows:

“To the lady living in Chiapinni Street, she has to unfortunately try to deal with the increasing tourist numbers in a mature way realising that her fellow community members are receiving a livelihood from these tourists. Respectful interactions with neighbours



Fig. 4. Tourists on the streets of Bo-Kaap in close proximity to resident's homes

Source: credit, Sirhan Jessa

are important. Getting to the average fellow community members is our aim”.

“Tourism can be punitive especially for the elderly who just want to go about living their lives, it seems like these properties will eventually be sold off to the highest bidder”.

Tourism has become a dominant activity in the Bo-Kaap. The residential and business landscape is changing to cater for tourist consumption. This study supports Cocola-Gant et al., (2020) theory that when tourism quickly becomes embedded in the urban space, the area becomes expensive and difficult to live in, a sentiment now shared by many residents. Anti-tourist sentiment stemming from poor management and a perceived lack of commensurate benefits emerged as a key concern. In Bo-Kaap resident attitudes have transformed from euphoria and apathy to annoyance and antagonism as tourist numbers in the hub of Wale and Chiapinni Streets often exceed saturation points. Planners are considering an increase in traffic infrastructure rather than limiting

growth or providing alternative approaches (CoCT, 2021b).

Some elements of the Bo-Kaap community are organising to challenge institutionalized power. Open antagonism is being expressed as in other popular urban tourism destinations such as Barcelona and Venice where aggressive positions have been taken against tourism (Capocchi et al., 2019; Milano et al., 2019b; González-Reverté & Guix, 2024). Direct aggression towards tour groups by some residents has become common. In addition, calls have been made for painting all the area's houses white, spraying tourists with water sprinklers, charging for photographs and erecting deliberate signage asking tourists to be quiet. Anger is expressed at city authorities for poor management and “selling out the Bo-Kaap to tourism”. One resident activist suggested further protests are likely while a tourism official was dismissive and pointing out that residents themselves would bear the cost of protest. It was stated as follows:

“Well then tourists will just go somewhere else, and like community members felt it during the protests and during COVID they will quickly feel the impact of no income. Tourists will just go to other sites. There is so much on offer in Cape Town. In terms of cultural tourism and poverty tourism, we have the same issue. Remember if we build houses and take everyone out of a pondokkie (shack), there is no more poverty tourism. It’s a similar thing here”.

Immediate and thoughtful actions are required to improve overall management of tourism in the Bo-Kaap. The findings support assertions that gentrification in the Bo-Kaap is driven by tourism. The host community increasingly has begun adopting the supply of accommodation, restaurants and cultural experiences. Unquestionably, increasing touristification provides economic opportunities where few other alternatives exist. This said, planning has done little to mitigate negative impacts and ensure that tourism development in Bo-Kaap addresses broader community concerns. Development plans prioritize growth and cater primarily to tourists. Yet, the research reveals that tourism development in the area cannot be divorced from broader community aspirations and socio-economic considerations. Tourism’s potential to engender a more equitable and sustainable model of development, one which affords due consideration to issues of social justice, cultural preservation, and economic empowerment is not being fulfilled in Cape Town’s Bo-Kaap.

In parallel with Ahn et al. (2000), while achieving a harmonious framework for the long term may be easy to conceptualise, operationalizing successful tourism development through specific initiatives has proven to be onerous. The need to quantify and operationalize destination level sustainability in the Bo-Kaap becomes evident. Benchmarking tourism impacts and placing limits on usage was found to be a developmental imperative (cf. Ahn et al., 2000; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2020). Wearing et al., (2019) contend that global tourism’s purpose is the commodification of a destination’s resources, including its social interactions, cultural, physical and natural environment. This is exemplified by the City of Cape Town’s continued targeted international marketing campaign which promotes home-based and corporate tourism businesses in the Bo-Kaap. In addition, tourism flows are often outside of the control of the host community which is one of the markers of overtourism. City officials contend that with the advent of social media, marketing has taken on a life of its own, along with multi-national marketing campaigns which seek to promote the area as part of Cape Town’s diverse travel offering. Operators

and agencies which utilise and promote the Bo-Kaap as a tourism attraction do not necessarily hold the sensitivities of locals and often are extractive, rather than developmental.

Nunkoo and Gursoy (2016) contend that positive interactions are only likely if tourism exchange is more equitable. This argument is supported in the Bo-Kaap as residents’ ability to control the resources required for tourism development is lacking, with the consequential loss of power. Struggles exist between those who benefit from tourism, such as resident tour operators and home businesses, and those who bear the cost. Residents from less-skilled or financially able segments, such as those in informal settlements are largely excluded from development policies and engagement processes. Established in 2021 in response to anti-tourist sentiment the Bo-Kaap Tourism Association has sought to include these left-out voices in their forums. Complaints about inadequate service delivery, poor maintenance and cleaning services, indicates that tourism revenue is not adequately reinvested into the community. By ensuring that a portion of tourism revenue is reinvested into local infrastructure and services, community amenities and quality of life can be enhanced and therefore help balance the burdens of tourism while improving resident support. Whilst the city authorities argue that the divisive nature of tourism cannot be changed, the local tourism association were optimistic that inclusive decision making and growth might be fostered via collaborative engagements.

Significant levels of resident discontent were linked to tourist behaviour that residents find disrespectful and intrusive. The lack of awareness of the cultural and religious norms has prompted the call for a formal code of conduct to enforce standards and address misconduct. Improving conduct centred on consent and sensitivity of taking photos of residents inside their homes, appropriate dress near places of worship, observing silence during the call to prayer, respecting private spaces by resisting climbing on to stoeps, placing feet on walls and reducing excessive noise levels. Several Facebook posts indicate the offence felt towards “disrespectful” tourists who take photographs without permission. One respondent made the point that photography in Islam, particularly of uncovered women, is forbidden. Several respondents considered they were being Disneyfied, or reduced to ‘animals in a zoo’ where privacy and the right to sit in peace outside your house is no longer available. The views expressed by two local residents are typical:

“This lady was sweeping her house dressed less modestly than usual without a scarf because she was in her home. Showing your hair and skin to strangers (especially strange men) is a big deal for a Muslim female elder and these tourists stopped and took photos of her. I had to go up to her and say something because she was going to potentially post that pic on Instagram and she hasn’t given consent. Those type of things really upset me. She was in her house sweeping her lounge like does she need to be part of this”.

“People were saying that they don’t want to be like animals in a cage when people come and visit.”

Sufficient points of commodification for retail and cultural exchange is lacking in local tourism. Instead, the attraction for scheduled tours is centred on taking pictures of the pretty, colourful houses, which provides little if any economic benefits. As the fine urban grain of the area, along with its sensitive intangible heritage elements, are incompatible with mass tourism this demands careful reconsideration. The Bo-Kaap experiences a regular stream of large and medium sized coaches which cause congestion and pollution. Tourists disembark at ad-hoc places and are given around 15 minutes to wander around the main tourist hub. A traffic plan proposed by community civics and aimed to ease congestion by excluding coaches has reportedly been ignored. The local tourism association along with many residents have campaigned for the establishment of a community administered walking tour. Such an initiative proposes pedestrianizing the tourist hub to reduce congestion, enhancing the overall tourism experience by facilitating direct access to local cultural offerings, providing greater opportunities for local employment and commodification, reducing economic leakages and consequentially ‘taking back’ some community controls of tourism. The views of a civic representative and local tour guide were as follows:

“I suggest a clear line, making the Bo-Kaap a walking tour because you can’t have that level of traffic coming in and out”.

“I suggest a training management plan for local guides, a hand over to local trained specialist guides are required, for both coaches and private tours, this way reducing the impact and increasing the benefit in terms of income and skills development”.

Integrating cultural experiences and fostering creative industries may contribute to conserving the area’s intangible cultural heritage. Derived tourism revenue could benefit community concerns and support independence from the reliance on government. Indeed, given government’s overwhelming developmental priorities, self-reliance will become increasingly relevant. According to the local tourism association, establishing a standardized narrative which pinpoints the area’s national heritage importance and provides an authentic, accurate storytelling experience, may be best achieved by establishing site guide qualifications for the area. This proposal has been rejected by local authorities on legal and practical grounds further reinforcing historically entrenched negative relationships with Cape Town authorities.

It was disclosed that sharing economy platforms, such as Airbnb, offer accessed to international markets and therefore provided opportunities for both residents and corporations. Airbnb Experiences in particular facilitates the provision of a trusted marketplace and is a powerful business model which connects tourists directly to the community and its cultural offerings (Hati et al., 2021). Several local operators in Bo-Kaap successfully advertise on the site, with experiences ranging from walking tours to cooking courses and personalised photo-shoots. Seemingly guests who book via these platforms are generally interested in the area’s historical significance and seek opportunities for direct cultural exchange. This research supports Guttentag’s (2015) work and shows the impacts of Airbnb Experiences (and others) can stimulate tourism development by marketing a particular neighbourhood to a global audience, provide additional income and directly support residents. This may, in turn, assist with maintenance, municipal taxes, living costs and contribute to resisting gentrification. The view expressed by one Bo-Kaap resident was as follows: “Airbnb has been created by good people and solves a problem and helped other families create income and feed their families. Even I am able to create income through these Airbnb experiences. So, it is not a bad company, it’s a tool. If not governed it will be misused and if it’s not managed with careful and responsible practices with a framework in place, it will be misused.”

Several contentious areas were identified. The approval by Cape Town authorities of a six-storey hotel (at 150 Buitengracht) places the local heritage asset of Auwal, South Africa’s oldest mosque in direct conflict with development and thereby entrenches historical trust deficits. A search on Airbnb clearly shows high concentrations of short-term rentals in such newly constructed developments. Here hosts are

mostly branded companies rather than individuals. The area's prime location, pleasant aesthetic and cultural appeal makes Bo-Kaap an ideal international real estate and short-term rental market acting as a trigger for gentrification (Horn & Visser, 2023). Overall, the results of the research point to the tenacity by which Airbnb seeks to grow in Cape Town as evidenced by the company's joint venture with Cape Town Tourism to develop a custom-built hub, which will run educational campaigns and encourage hosting. This is targeted at attracting digital nomads and represents an extension of Airbnb's 'live and work anywhere initiative' (BusinessTech, 2022). The recent approval of a remote working visa in South Africa will further stimulate the growth of digital nomads in Cape Town and including Bo-Kaap. The current consensus among local respondents is that the number of short-term rentals in the Bo-Kaap is limited and as yet does not necessitate regulation. Nevertheless, the lessons for Cape Town from the experience of other urban tourism destinations should serve as caution for current development models, particularly in working class neighbourhoods (O'Reagan & Choe, 2017; Visser et al., 2017; Wearing et al., 2019; Robertson et al., 2020; Calle-Vaquero et al., 2021).

Three expanding pockets of informal settlements exist in the Bo-Kaap all requiring urgent upgrading and services. Rather than improve services and living conditions for these poor, the city authorities have neglected to address spatial justice. Instead they have favoured the approval of property mega-developments which create islands of exclusivity. As a whole the production of space in the Bo-Kaap is not only manifesting itself in various forms of injustice but continues to reproduce them, and therefore reinforces relations of domination and oppression as suggested more broadly by Lefebvre (1974).

5. Conclusion

Arguably, whilst tourism gentrification continues to attract an expanding scholarship in the urban Global North the issue as yet has received only limited attention in Southern cities. In sub-Saharan Africa, in particular, the existing literature is sparse (Horn & Visser, 2023). The novel contribution of this paper is to interrogate the impact of tourism gentrification on the inner-city precinct of the Bo-Kaap neighbourhood in Cape Town, South Africa. The Bo-Kaap's distinctive architectural and culinary contributions represent

a history forged through adversity and adaptation. Community life is deeply influenced by Islam which is central to cultural identity. The growth of tourism gentrification in this area must be understood as one outcome of Cape Town's emergence as a leading destination for international tourism following South Africa's democratic transition in 1994 (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2017; Chetty & Visser, 2025).

The research clearly illustrates a restructuring of the physical and economic landscape, where tourism and urban redevelopment are dominant activities. Newly constructed mega-property developments stand as symbols of injustice, and for many residents represent a new form of forced removal. The findings demonstrate that it is often difficult for residents to separate the processes of touristification and gentrification as they produce indistinguishable impacts. Balancing the right to develop and community rights in the Bo-Kaap has been a difficult and complex challenge. Overall, the research lends credence to Doxey's (1975) 'irridex' as residents' perceptions of tourism have depreciated to annoyance and antagonism. Although for some residents the growth of tourism presents opportunities for income generation, most appear to resent its continued expansion and impacts on everyday life. As current conditions can be described as chaotic the conceptual frame of overtourism is readily applicable to the Bo-Kaap which displays many of its destructive hallmarks. Uncontrolled tourism growth and poor management has degraded the quality of life for many residents and induced suffering from excessive visitation.

The results disclose that whilst tourism presents several opportunities for economic prosperity and cultural preservation, at present the sector is not being effectively leveraged for its transformative potential. Local planning can be criticised for being anaemic and incoherent with appropriate management of the tourism sector largely absent. Approval for incongruent large-scale property developments combined with excessive tourism visitation is causing displacement, socio-spatial inequality and uneven geographic development. Arguably, many of the physical impacts might be rectified via decisive municipal action in the short term, while underscoring the urgent need for establishing a strategic, integrated, community-centred plan for long-term development. In final analysis this underscores the urgency for the city authorities of Cape Town to take appropriate actions and to resist abdicating responsibility for the burden that current property development and tourism growth is placing on the residents of Bo-Kaap.

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