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Assessing heritage preservation in post-apartheid urban landscapes: insights from the street names of Newtown

Nyamwanza, Shylet

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ABSTRACT

The use of heritage-led urban development to promote sustainable urban regeneration through place making, preservation of urban identity, promoting tourism and nurturing creative economic development is growing (Ebbe, 2009). One of the goals of street naming in South Africa is heritage preservation (Ndletyana, 2012). Ever since street renaming unfolded in South Africa some places are still dealing with tensions and debates regarding the goals of renaming (Chauke, 2015). Whilst most studies have investigated name origins, and driving forces behind street renaming, what is missing is an academic account of the citizens' narratives and interpretations behind these names. This study assessed how people interpret street names in Newtown, Johannesburg through face to face interviews, archival research as well as observations. The aim was to assess people's urban memory and investigate whether they share the same perceptions with the government of preserving heritage through street names. The study revealed that street renaming coupled with selective criteria for preserving heritage and limited awareness programs may not be the best way to preserve heritage. According to the respondents' concerns, the way the renaming was conducted, influenced its insignificant contribution to heritage preservation, specifically intangible heritage. Furthermore, channelling resources to street renaming frustrates citizens when a country has other challenges like high unemployment rates, inadequate housing and high poverty levels. The study suggested several recommendations to enhance heritage preservation through street naming.