A Discourse Analysis of the Urban Imaginaries Represented in Tourism Marketing for Johannesburg in the Post-Apartheid Era

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Abstract

Like many cities around the world Johannesburg began marketing to attract tourists in the 1990s. Johannesburg has in the last couple of years become a 'hot' tourism destination and is increasingly ranked among the top global tourist destinations. Tourist cities market their cultural, historical shopping, entertainment and lifestyle attractions to attract tourists and wealthy residents. They also regenerate older historical districts or build new attractions in the form of high profile infrastructure and architecture. To attract tourists, cities use discourse to represent themselves in certain ways to the prospective tourist. This discourse found in tourism marketing and other communications; creates certain expectations or commonly held imaginings of a city as a tourism destination. These are referred to as tourism imaginaries. In cities these 'tourism imaginaries' become absorbed as urban imaginaries that shape not only tourist spaces, but the whole city. The research aims to deconstruct the imaginaries represented in Johannesburg's tourism marketing to understand how tourism is shaping Johannesburg in line with this view. Discourse analysis is used as a method to achieve this. Michel Foucault understood discourse as a system of representation, where discourse is a way of creating meaning by representing knowledge and exercising power around a subject at a certain time in history and in a particular way. Besides the content analysis of the tourism marketing, the discourse analysis also captured how tourism businesses in three case study sites namely Newtown Precinct, Vilakazi Street and Montecasino Entertainment Complex have responded to the discourses in the City's tourism marketing. A central argument made is that the drive to create tourist cities reinforces rather than reduces power inequalities and creates further fragmentation by creating pockets of exceptionalism reserved for tourists. The research contributes to the recent interest in the cultural and political understandings of cities which considers the often invisible or overlooked manifestations of power that shape cities. In the research tourism imaginaries are conceptualised as central in the generation and shaping of social practices in the City. It was concluded that the move to create tourist cities has given tourists and other tourism actors symbolic power, shaping the city by remote control, and therefore reinforcing global power dynamics that have shaped the world since colonial times.