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TOWARDS THE RESPONSIBLE MANAGEMENT OF THE SOCIO-CULTURAL IMPACT OF TOWNSHIP TOURISM

by

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SUMMARY

Prior to the 1994 democratic elections, urban tourism in South Africa was strictly confined to so-called 'white' areas. Black townships, prevented from constituting an integral part of 'white' cities, were developed as dormitory towns, far removed from central business districts and white urban areas. Today post-apartheid Soweto, a conurbation of two million inhabitants with a rich political history, has come to symbolise the political freedom of the new South Africa. Since South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994 township tourism has been growing rapidly, with international tourists eager to see how the country has progressed. Motivated by an interest in the ethnic diversity and rich cultural heritage manifested in the daily lives and practices of township residents, tourists are visiting Soweto in increasing numbers.

Because cultural tourists are motivated by local cultures in choosing to visit a particular attraction, they have been identified as both a blessing and blight, as communities living in townships are affected both positively and negatively by township tourism. The socio-cultural impacts of township tourism in South Africa, however, are not well documented. The purpose of the research undertaken was therefore to investigate the socio-cultural impacts of township tourism, as perceived by the host population, using Soweto as a case study. The purpose of this thesis is thus to present the findings of research conducted using a multiple-item Likert scale, in-depth interviews and participant observation as means for investigating host perceptions of socio-cultural impacts of township tourism in Soweto.

This study reveals that respondents were divided in their perceptions of the impacts of tourism on the host community. Those who received economic or employment benefits from tourism generally viewed its socio-cultural impacts positively. Conversely, others who did not receive these benefits claimed that the inequitable distribution of benefits from tourism has led to community friction, growing antipathy towards tourists and commodification of traditional culture. Blame is laid partially at the door of government who, it is claimed, has neither afforded residents the opportunity for participation in

decision-making relating to tourism planning and development in the township, nor offered the requisite funding or skills development support. A systematic analysis of tourism impacts can therefore help government planners, local decision-makers, tourism promoters and managers identify real concerns and issues in order for appropriate policies and action to be introduced.

The challenge of managing sustainable township tourism in South Africa, using a community approach, is discussed. Results from the study have the potential to provide the foundation on which to formulate principles or guidelines and recommend approaches to be applied in the development and management of sustainable township tourism in South Africa, so as to create the basis necessary for good practice for any community cultural tourism project.

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