

“Dancing on the ceiling”: spatial paradoxes in
the aspirations of young Black entrepreneurs in
Johannesburg tourism

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Why this study...?

- What excites young people that can be used for livelihoods?
- Chance meeting at a restaurant in Yeoville, introduced to a network of...
- Storytellers, who mixed leisure and work, inhabiting spaces:

“It’s just storytelling From young . . . my granny will narrate stories . . . I picked up my camera, it was a version of me telling my story. I went on to do walking tours, sharing a city story (told by) people that grew up in the landscape. . . we’re sharing our stories, obviously with elements of great hospitality.”

- Tourism a sector of potential for meaningful youth livelihoods



Young Black gifted: tourism entrepreneurs

- Interviewed 10 young Black tourism entrepreneurs in Johannesburg
- Tell 4 stories in the paper:
inner-city tower; backpacker owner; township bicycle tour; former migrant hostel tour
- Will share 1 today
- A 'niche' group: small number of success stories

Using resources across spaces

- Young Black tourism sector entrepreneurs: at a fault line between township and mainstream economies
- Use stories, practices, historical artefacts and buildings in marginalized spaces *and* schooling, English language and relationships with privileged others
- The capitals that these young people brought were knowledge of informal spaces – as authentic inhabitants – supplemented with English, schooling, privileged friends – largely from other spaces.
- Navigate between mainstream and township/inner-city economies.
- Not just a hustle (leveraging opportunities beyond institutions): accessing resources in one context and redeploying them in another
- Morphing

Thatho's story: the unplanned township bicycle tour

Using resources across spaces

- A township bicycle tour in Alexandra that **may** include stops at Nelson Mandela's former house, drinking *umqombothi*, playing soccer, observing dancing and local fashion, church on Sundays and a township history:

“the only tour in Johannesburg that is not planned”

- Hockey helped Thatho establish a business after he spent time in prison
- A French Peugeot employee, his teammate, who helped establish his business in the township:

“I had a good friend from France. I started my own team in my township, he coached. I called him and his friends in the 2010 World Cup to come see the place. It was a wonderful thing, they paid a lot of money that my mother could earn in a month.”

- Team sport catalyses social capital, transcends social and professional identities, generates networks of connections (Putnam 2000; Bourdieu 1986).
- Relationships forged elsewhere used in the township





Thatho: Using resources across spaces

- Township's proximity to Sandton helped with potential clients:

“My first proper client was from KLM, the Dutch airline. I went to a very expensive hotel. The receptionist threw the brochures in the bin. The client saw him, she said ‘the gentleman has given you some brochures, can I see one?’ She organised her friends . . . friends told friends . . . it was just word of mouth, which just grew and grew.”

- Used Sandton businesses for township market
- 



Challenges:
finance,
regulatory
frameworks,
certification

Finance:

- After initial success lacked finance: secured a loan, backed by his mother, to purchase bicycles.
- 17 out of 25 small business owners in this township borrowed start-up money from family (Rogerson 2004)
- But serious capital hard to get:

“To have a partnership . . . is really difficult. There are standards that Tsogo Sun needs . . . As a Black person, you don’t have funds to get to the standard . . . a business plan, you need a lot of money to do a proper one I have a transport company, I have equipment, but it’s not in the good standards.”

- Financial capital linked to knowledge and credentials- acceptable business plan, financial compliance, often emerges from social networks and educational resources



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Regulation:

“Tourism associations don’t understand township markets . . . Compliance, they’ll say you have to comply with the waste management regulation, what they call ‘responsible tourism’ . . . areas like this place, you’re selling the authenticity of this place, how raw it is, so you cannot make improvements to this. Fix signage for this and this. It works differently in the township . . . Certain things we put in place don’t fit with responsible tourism and their standards.”

- He secured a tour guide certificate at Wits University, but this was only one of a number of certifications needed
- Government support 2010 Football World Cup, struggled to access this kind of help from official structures during other periods



Thatho and the other successful entrepreneurs

- Ability to navigate between spaces- logics and rules- identifying ways to access the potential of one space through capitals from another, gave these youth a 'competitive advantage'.
- Knowing how to sell a 'raw' or 'authentic' experience in the township or inner-city by drawing on English language, education and relationships with privileged others enabled these young people's success.
- Tourism sector = a number of 'sub-fields' that correlate with physical spaces across the city, with social and cultural capitals and a variety of 'rules of the game' associated with each sub-field.

Township tourism, entrepreneurship: A dancefloor and a ceiling

- “Their ingenuity lay in their ability to recognise opportunities across spaces of the post-apartheid cityscape, translating and morphing practices from one space to another, as they danced on the ceiling of the township/inner-city tourism industry. These young people accumulated forms of capital from various sources to create unique informal enterprises, but as they settled and began to expand, the rules of the game from the mainstream economy hampered their upward mobility.”
- Consolidating and expanding their businesses required them to recalibrate relationships with the formal economy: comply with regulations, get more finance etc
- In SA most economic sectors, including tourism, are dominated by a few large companies that quash competition (Philip 2018; Marais 2013).
- 60–70% of the tourism industry controlled by six companies, despite SMMEs representing 95% of enterprises in tourism (Cornelissen 2005; Rogerson 2008).
- The inner-city/ township spaces therefore formed both ‘dancefloor’ and a ceiling to their success