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The Story of My Life? Uncovering Transmodern in Experiences of Tourists Staying in Soweto

Maisa C. Adinolfi

University of Johannesburg, mcorreia@uj.ac.za

Milena Ivanovic

mivanovic@uj.ac.za

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Title: The Story of My Life? Uncovering Transmodern in Experiences of Tourists Staying in Soweto

Author: Maisa C. Adinolfi & Milena Ivanovic

Affiliation: University of Johannesburg

Contact: mcorreia@uj.ac.za

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Abstract:

Transmodernism (Ateljevic, 2009; Gelter, 2010) represents the new value system towards an integration into an environmentally, economically, and socially sustainable world (Pritchard, Morgan & Ateljevic, 2011), as well as a new economic order embedded in a mature phase of the post-capitalist experiential economy, the authentic economy (Gilmore & Pine, 2007). This new economy denotes a paradigm shift in production and consumption of the economic value from staging the consumers' experiences to rendering authenticity which results in personal transformation. Pine and Gilmore's (1999:166) proposition that transformation value should be added as a fifth economic offering, in addition to commodities, goods, services, and experiences, confirms the repositioning of the post-capitalist economic values to the requirements of a new emerging transmodern world order. Gilmore and Pine (2007) ascertain that transformation value is the ultimate economic value rendered through authentic qualities of the products which lead to personal transformation positioned as the highest order (above self-actualisation) on Maslow's hierarchy (Gelter, 2010). Therefore, the new economic proposition is not about delivering a service or staging 'authentic' experiences but rather about guiding a consumer (tourist) towards personal, individualised transformation beyond self-actualisation (Gelter, 2010) where the tourist becomes a product and a co-creator in the process of the production of authentic meanings. As the transformation value is preconditioned by the provision of authentic offerings as part of new authentic tourism, it is suggested that only an immersive, 'live as a local' type of authentic tourist stay can lead to experience co-creation resulting in personal transformation.

Soweto, a famous township and a must-see tourist destination on the outskirts of Johannesburg, is regarded as a dangerous and unsafe place, which is why it is predominantly visited as part of organised half-day tours. The aim of this paper is to profile tourists choosing to stay in Soweto and to ascertain how many of those are in fact the new breed of authentic tourists searching for personal transformation. More specifically, this paper is set to uncover characteristics of such tourists, what motivates them to do that, and to what extent they co-create their experiences with locals. In particular, this paper is set to establish to what extent tourists staying in Soweto engage in immersive co-creative activities and which of these authentic activities, if any, lead to a transformatory experience.

Methodologically, this is an exploratory, qualitative study based on 30 semi-structured interviews with tourists staying in Soweto. The data were collected over a period of 6 months, from December 2016 to the end of May 2017. A content analysis of transcribed interviews and demographic profiles of respondents are summarised and discussed in the context of the main findings. The study represents a contribution to scarce academic literature on authentic economy and the transformatory tourist experience. Additionally it offers a deeper understanding of the mechanisms of how immersive experiences are created and which of these experiences/activities actually lead to personal transformations.