

## Constructing Township Tourism for Foreign Consumption

### Abstract

**Aboshioke UMEJEI**   
Culture Heritage and Tourism,  
University of KwaZulu Natal,  
Durban, South Africa, Email,  
[Umejeia@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:Umejeia@ukzn.ac.za)  
**Corresponding author**

**Maheshvari NAIDU**   
Culture Heritage and Tourism,  
University of KwaZulu Natal,  
Durban, South Africa, Email,  
[naiduu@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:naiduu@ukzn.ac.za)

Township tourism in South Africa is an increasingly attractive phenomenon, especially for foreign tourists. For many international tourists, the motivation resides in their quest for an authentic local African cultural experience. However, due to its complex phenomenon, the notion of 'township tourism' has been relatively subjective in its promise of an authentic (African) experience. While some scholars suggest that township tourism exploits the "poor", others argue that township tourism is a poverty alleviation mechanism. This study works on the premise that a complex cluster of issues surrounds what we understand as 'township tourism'. It examines how South Africa's rich culture and heritage products, such as township tourism, are constructed and enacted to attract tourists in the Umlazi township in the eThekweni Municipality. The exploratory, descriptive design using semi-structured interviews was employed to obtain qualitative data. Analysis of findings revealed that constructing and enacting indigenous heritage spaces as products for tourism consumption in Umlazi is a move to change the trajectory that views township tours as an exploration of poverty. Based on empirical engagement with the community, it becomes evident that culture and heritage are viable resources that can be used as tools for township tourism development.

**Keywords:** township tourism, construction, tourism attraction, Indigenous, local

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### Introduction

In South Africa, '*township*' is a term used to describe neighbourhoods home to previously disadvantaged groups of people, often with high densities and poor infrastructure. These communities consist of people who have brought their culture and heritage from diverse rural backgrounds, which results in the areas having unique heritage, culture and traditions. According to Frenzel et al. (2015), the transition of South Africa from the Apartheid era to democracy contributed to the emergence of township tourism in the late 1990s. Booyens & Rogerson (2015) suggest that this type of tourism targets foreign visitors with a particular interest in culture and heritage. The nature and 'pull' of this form of tourism are mainly structured around community-based resources. The unique promise of township tourism can be accredited to how it enhances the value of the experience for tourists by providing them with an authentic African experience. According to Nyawo & Mashau (2019), past experiences in South Africa have made townships and rural areas to be at the heartbeat of the heritage tourism industry. Township tourism as opined by Frenzel (2016) is therefore an essential contribution to the tourism industry in South Africa. George & Booyens (2014) stated that early township tours mainly took international visitors to anti-apartheid struggle sites and spaces of poverty. Turok et al. (2018) suggest that contemporary township tours offer tourists educational and entertaining experiences, cultural and heritage attractions, traditional cuisine and historical insights. According to South African Tourism Statistics, the provinces and township locations that receive the most international visitors annually are Soweto in Gauteng, Khayelitsha in Western Cape, and Umlazi in KwaZulu-Natal. Umlazi is the largest township in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) Province and the fourth largest in South Africa (United Nations Human Settlements Programme Situation Analysis, 2007:1). According to Chili (2015:12), Umlazi was initially an outskirt residential of Durban but later became a township, mainly due to the port activities coupled with the light and heavy industries that were located nearby along the coastline.

Jili et al. (2017) suggest that the many tourism activities within Umlazi are stimulating its local economy, including a section called Engonyameni, which is currently being marketed and advertised by the Umlazi township board as a destination full of cultural and heritage tourism 'attractions'. While much has been written about features characterising a 'tourist attraction', only a few studies have interrogated their formulation and construction. Benur & Bramwell (2015) assert that tourist attractions entice tourists to a destination because they rely on primary tourism products as mechanisms to pull and motivate the visit. According to Booyens (2010), in townships, tourism attraction products are mainly cultural and heritage, traditional cuisine, historical insights and local arts and crafts. This contradicts the description by George & Booyens (2014), who viewed township tourism in South Africa as a form of poverty tourism. This study departs from a critique of township tourism and its link to poverty and looks at what may dignify and recognise heritage cultural sites as viable tourist attractions. The study is positioned to examine the consumption of township tourism in South Africa and its corresponding impact on the community. It explores the process of constructing and enacting these tourism attractions to establish the role they hold for tourism consumption in order to attain sustainable township tourism development. Therefore, the next section of this paper reviews the literature on culture and township tourism and focuses on its growth, African heritage and the development of indigenous cultural monuments as tourism products.

### Literature review

Monama et al. (2022:3), in their study of spatial planning in South Africa, stated that the segregation of people into different spaces in South Africa was a product of the apartheid government. Neighbourhoods were designed and segregated in a manner that limited the exposure to other race groups and the celebration of their culture and heritage. The development of township



exploration as a form of tourism could only occur after the advent of democracy in the mid-1990s (Frenzel et al., 2015). The township tours through these areas were aimed at bringing visitors to sites of anti-apartheid significance to enlighten tourists about issues of poverty related to historically oppressed communities (Booyens & Rogerson, 2019; Leonard & Dladla, 2020). Mkono (2019) suggests that South Africa thrives on its rich natural and cultural assets, with research suggesting that many international tourists are partial to South Africa as their 'choice destination' for township tourism when they desire to indulge themselves with African culture and heritage (Booyens & Rogerson, 2019; Ivanovic & Saayman, 2013). According to Statistics South Africa (StatsSA, 2024), international tourists who visit South Africa account for a significant percentage of the total number of tourism activities recorded, their visits stimulating the economic growth of the country (Muzindutsi et al., 2021:2; Auala et al., 2019: 1). Hugo et al. (2023) describes South African as a country blessed with a variety of culture and heritage attractions in the tourism industry. It is, therefore, essential to explore and understand the process by which these heritage spaces, specifically in Umlazi, are intended to become authentic African cultural tourism products for foreign consumption.

### ***Township tourism***

Several studies have revealed that in the last few decades, tourists have preferred travel that broadens their knowledge rather than visiting the usual sand, sun and sea destinations (Ma, 2010; Mahika, 2011; Bayih & Singh, 2020). During apartheid, South Africa's tourist attractions were mainly the scenic beauty, wildlife and good climate (Lubbe, 2003; Ramchander, 2007). The emergence of 'township tourism' is mainly a phenomenon of the democratic era, through which international tourists are educated about South Africa's apartheid past (Rogerson & Visser (2007). Frenzel (2016) opines that many international tourists often feature township tourism as an essential activity to undertake while in the country. He further postulates that some consider township tourism to represent the broader global phenomenon of slum tourism, which includes organised tours to impoverished areas. Kieti & Magio (2013) stated that township tourism could further be described as slumming, poorism and philanthropic tourism, with the discourse around township tourism portraying poverty as a tourist attraction (Burgold et al., 2013). Despite this discourse, many townships in South Africa are increasingly attractive to foreign tourists for various reasons, such as culture and heritage, as they offer an opportunity to experience authentic township cultural and heritage products (George & Booyens, 2014). Townships are positioning themselves on the pleasure periphery and emerging as niche leisure and tourism markets (Jurgens et al., 2013), and their products focus on cultural and heritage attractions, traditional cuisine, historical insights, and local arts and crafts Booyens (2010). From the cultural perspective, township tourism attractions are increasingly being sought after by both indigenous and international tourists. In the late 90s, Young (1999) described tourist attractions as places that attribute particular meanings and values to make them appealing to tourists, with 'attractions' in their different forms and types being the main reason for tourism. According to Lew (1987), there will be no point of tourism without attraction, while Ioannide & Timothy (2010) reaffirm that there will be no point of attraction without tourism. Many scholars have, however, criticised this perspective and argue that there are other activities that tourists can engage in without visiting tourist attractions, such as visiting friends and relatives (VFR), attending cultural festivals or even on a business trip. Edelheim (2015) argues that while there may be other activities that the tourist can engage in at a destination, all those various activities have an 'attraction' element that makes the experience worthwhile for the tourist.

### ***African heritage and township tourism***

Heritage is often used to describe a set of values, principles, monuments or resources that relate to the past and are passed down from generation to generation. The South African National Heritage Resources Act (RSA, 1999:659) defines *heritage resources* as "any place or object of cultural significance" and is momentous in constructing African states' identity. According to Zhang et al. (2023), a city's history and culture are mostly often displayed through heritage, which is a way to attract tourists. Ivanovic & Saayman (2013) suggest that African cultural heritage must be effectively packaged and presented to promote cultural tourism. Research on cultural heritage tourism development in sub-Saharan Africa has emphasised the significance of its development as one of the portfolios of sustainable development (Ivanovic & Saayman, 2013; Saarinen & Rogerson, 2015). Ramchander (2007) suggests a constant struggle between market viability and the authentic representations of local cultures, which is a concern for 'culture' preservation. According to Lundup (2013), as contemporary anthropologists agree that culture is essentially constructed or invented, upholding the notion of 'inauthentic' versus 'authentic' cultural representations would be reverting to essentialism, Coşkun (2021) suggests that tourism companies that create staged authenticity, do so in order to meet tourist demand. Pirie (2007) posits that tourists are often taken to township areas on superficial journeys or pseudo-trips that do not reflect past or present realities. Turning cultural elements into products and services just for tourist consumption or commodifying heritage resources for tourism is a corruptible influence that can hurt the conservation of such resources (Du Cros, 2001). However, several studies (Pradana, 2018; Young & Markham, 2020; Coskun, 2021) have noted the benefits of the commodification of the culture not just for the sake of tourism but also as a way by which heritage can be used for present and future purposes.

### ***Methodology***

This exploratory study employed a qualitative research design based on semi-structured in-depth interviews. Several techniques used in collecting data for this research include exploring the study area, observation, semi-structured interviews and reviewing previous documentation. The sampling method to identify people to participate in the interviews was purposive and snowballing, as it involved identifying and selecting individuals or groups who were knowledgeable about or had experience with the topic of interest. An interview was confirmed with the vice chairman of the Umlazi township board, after which other



credible and trustworthy persons were identified and introduced. The target populations were the various stakeholders whose role was to ensure sustainable tourism development, including members of the Umlazi tourism board, who assisted with recruiting some tourists, custodians of the sacred sites and community members. The study location was Umlazi, specifically Engoyameni, the tourism sight being enacted. The researcher undertook a tour of the Umlazi township area, which was tailored to meet the study's objective and provided by the tourism board. This local tour guide became a study participant. This tour included an overview of the local history, a view of the township area and an opportunity to taste local cuisine, including inyama (meat) and local beer (Umqombothi). The tour enabled a personal experience of a township tour. It provided general knowledge about the dynamics of the study site, enabling notes to be taken about essential aspects of the township tours. Relevant documents from reliable online resources were used as secondary data to complement the data collected from the interviews and ensure a comprehensive selection of data from which to conduct the analysis. The audio recordings of all the interviews were transcribed, after which a systematic classification of themes and patterns was identified for further analysis. In line with ethical considerations, all participants were given pseudonyms to protect their identity while presenting the data. These pseudonyms were coded as UM01; UM represents the site name, and 01 is the first interviewee.

The constructionism paradigm was followed to analyse the data using MacCannell's (1999) semiotic attraction theory as a theoretical lens. According to Sandu (2013), the central premise of constructionism assumes that the world is known by a series of multiple socially constructed realities. Gergen (1984:65) defined *social constructionism* as a perspective in which a great deal of human life exists as it does due to social and interpersonal influences. MacCannell's theory of semiotics was selected due to its detailed presentation of the construction processes of tourism attractions. It focuses on and defines *semiotics* as a sign representing something to someone and has been applied to several tourism studies (Metro-Roland, 2009; Soica, 2016). Although semiotics owes its root to language, MacCannell (2013) effectively applied the theory in tourism research to understand how tourist attractions are constructed and given meaning. His application in tourism research suggests that, from a semiotic perspective, a tourist sight (site) is transformed into a tourist attraction through five "sight sacralisation" stages. Paraskevaidis & Weidenfeld (2021) agree that Peircean semiotic theory helps to connect the observable representations of signs to their signified object, thereby emphasising the 'interpretant' role of signs.

### **Analysis and discussion**

Peircean semiotics was used to explain how stakeholders in the Umlazi tourism enhanced the meaning and values attached to the cultural heritage sites at Engoyameni to construct them to become a tourist attraction suitable for foreign consumption. The definition of *sign* is the starting point of semiotics, its purpose being to establish how signs operate in the world of meaning, with Peirce (1994) contending that a sign will only function as such if and when it is understood to be a sign. Peirce also stressed that not all signs produced the same interpretant or sequence in all interpreters and suggested the social nature of semiotics. The social construction paradigm, which consists of various approaches, argues that social and cultural phenomena are produced by cultural and historical forces that rely on human interactions and communications. Soica (2016), in a study on tourism and the practice of making meaning, suggested that the semiotic construction of tourism landscapes is a process that involves the reconstruction of a sign by both the tourism promoters and the tourists themselves. While the tourism promoters (re)construct the signs of a place to build a particular experience at that destination, the tourists, in turn, (re)construct the signs to supply themselves with significance based on their experience (2016). MacCannell & MacCannell (1984) suggest that tourist attractions are '*signs*,' as they consist of a 'marker' 'a sight' and 'a tourist'. Consequently, this study builds on Peirce's formulation, which suggests that a "sign represents something to someone" as a theoretical foundation to understand the formation of Engoyameni as a tourism attraction in Umlazi. MacCannell (2013) proposed the semiotic attraction theory for sight sacralisation, inspired by Peircean semiotics theory. The semiotic attraction theory explains the processes in the semiotic construction of tourist attractions in five stages: naming, framing and elevation, enshrinement, mechanical reproduction and social reproduction.

### ***Naming: Enhancing township tourism***

In MacCannell's semiotic attraction theory (2013), the first stage for a site sacralisation is the naming stage. At this stage, a site or a place from similar objects is identified or marked as worthy of preservation. Mengich (2011) described township areas as places generally characterised by semi-standard housing, lack of security, and, in most cases, large populations. Ngwathe (2022) contended that road construction and extending business support to Umlazi township are part of the government's strategy to revitalise the area to boost its tourism potential. Consequently, Umlazi, with its rich cultural heritage, has also been receiving attention as a destination for township tourism development. Early academic observers of township tourism described township tours as cultural tourism, including visits to shebeens (drinking places), jazz venues, artists, craft markets and dancing shows (Ramchander, 2004; Rogerson, 2004). However, there is an increasing consensus amongst members of township communities that with its lack of effective governance, the government has an ulterior motive in their desire to maintain a particular narrative that describes the township areas as "poor and hopeless".

One participant stated, "we cannot even put a finger on the need for those ulterior motives. However, the bottom line is that it does not add value or do anything good for the affected ordinary citizens" (UM01). To change this negative narrative, members of the Umlazi Tourism board have devised initiatives that will lead to tremendous growth in the township, with many of the local businesses striving to change the negative perception they have had to bear for years" (UM05). Mbane & Ezeuduji (2022) suggests that residents should be active stakeholders in tourism development management to change the destination's negative image. One of the plans by the local township tourism board to boost tourism within Umlazi township is an attempt



to reorient hostel dwellers to make them appreciate the beauty of connecting with people. According to Rogerson & Mthombeni (2015), hostels represent the legacies of the apartheid area's settlement construction, which were built as dwelling shelters for circulatory migrants who migrated from rural areas, where their families lived to work in the mines, factories and construction sites. However, these hostel dwellers have never integrated adequately into township life and have become shelters for the unemployed who live in poverty, providing advocates of violence a willing reception.

One of the participants (UM05) argued that many people who castigate "the hostels" have never seen or even visited the place and are afraid to do so due to stories they have heard about the squalor and violence. However, according to all the participants interviewed, some stories are untrue. A participant explained that most tourists to Umlazi are from the local corporate sector, as they are still trying to dispel that notion of danger, which has been working against tourism development in township areas. Furthermore, the restricted movement associated with the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2021 looting in KZN led to a drastic decline in township tours because many people fear the area. While the issues and concerns around violence in township areas cannot be downplayed, a participant claimed that:

"I want people to know one thing: everywhere is risky, you understand. But if you want to show people that you are scared, you are going to be a target. So when people say it is dangerous, it is because they are doing a wrong thing, because when you're coming here doing a wrong thing, you will never survive it. I won't lie to you. It is because of the way they're protecting this place, so it is not safe when you have a bad intention.

The above comment was further confirmed by the chairman of the Umlazi tourism board, who said that "hostels have changed so much that there are families with kids that are now living in Hostels". As part of efforts by significant tourism stakeholders to promote peace and end violence in the hostels, the Glebelands Hostel in Umlazi Township hosted the Ingoma Cultural Festival in 2022. Despite the many obstacles to tourism development in Umlazi, local community members are trying to develop initiatives to give their community relevance and promote tourism in their locality; they intend to carve a niche and remain relevant in the tourism industry.

#### ***(Re)framing and elevation: Reposition township tourism***

The second stage in MacCannell's semiotic attraction theory (2013) is the framing and elevation stage. During this phase, efforts are made to protect and preserve the sacred site or object. The nature reserve being constructed at Engoyameni may have passed this stage, which is attributed to the relevance that community members associated with it. According to a member of the Umlazi tourism board, arrangements are being made to ensure that the area is protected from encroachment.

"We do not plan to alter anything or celebrate it just for tourists' entertainment purposes. Engoyameni is still a rural space, with maidens and young boys performing the coming-of-age ceremonies and the different leaders ruling those kids."

In a study on the benefits of promoting and preserving cultural heritage values, Hoang (2021) suggests that the benefits of preserving cultural heritage are immeasurable, as it is an irreplaceable tourism resource. Their study submits that to address the relationship between heritage conservation and sustainable tourism development; it is necessary to respect the original heritage. Duval & Smith (2013), in their study on World Heritage sites, opined that the economic impact and significance of culture and heritage to tourism cannot be overemphasised and that the importance of heritage as a viable tool for the development of sustainable tourism in South Africa cannot be over-emphasised. Viljoen & Henama (2017) submit that heritage, as a tourism product, is distributed across urban and rural areas, with the rural areas in South Africa having much to contribute due to rich natural landscapes and local cultural offerings. In South Africa, visits to township areas have been described by scholars as a sought-after cultural heritage experience for many inbound tourists (Gumede, 2019; Booyens, 2021), with township tourism being a niche segment marketed to foreign tourists as a 'must-do' activity (George & Booyens, 2014). The emphasis on 'foreign' is not to marginalise the locals as though they are insignificant, the contention being that not many local "Blacks" engage in this form of tourism. One participant interviewed said, "You do not get locals going for these trips since it is already their lifestyle, so these settings are mostly fascinating to foreign tourists". Research conducted by Horner & Swarbrooke (2016) submits that township tours offer international tourists both an educational and entertaining experience as it provides insight into South Africa's history. Mazhande & Mamimine (2020) contend that heritage has redefined township tourism and that tourists are delighted with cultural attractions such as arts and crafts, museums and historical buildings.

One of the international tourists interviewed in this study stated that as an African who lives in America, it is essential to know and appreciate the beauty of other Black cultures worldwide. Quintana (2020) stated that the trend in tourism is gradually shifting to cultural tourism, which is environmentally friendly and promotes natural (fauna and flora) tourism. One participant shared that "the township areas is home to the rich culture of South Africa, not just in Umlazi but across the country as a whole". One of the stakeholders interviewed shared his concerns about the conservation and preservation of their cultural heritage, and that "culture in South Africa is geared mainly at attracting tourists whereas, in other parts of the world, the preservation of their culture is what attracts tourists" (UM02). To guard against this, attempts are being made by the Umlazi tourism board to digitalise their culture and heritage, particularly their history.

"With digital, you are able to create so that people get to understand the story. We want to show the images kept in photographs or book refit, having engagements with the late, now storytellers. By having a museum, you can actually create the picture. And we have seen it happening in other countries, but in South Africa, especially in townships and rural spaces, we are supposed to just tell the story. Then, when you, the story's teller, die, that story is gone. And so it





is very important to preserve that, yeah. Even the biggest township that has the most significant stories is not digitalised. So digitalising is one aspect that a major township, any township in South Africa needs” (UM04)

The diverse cultural heritage background and extensive political history in township areas have attracted many international tourists visiting South Africa. Many township areas, including Umlazi, have popularised the "ekasi shisanyama experience", a combination of music, food and entertainment being the high point of township tours. According to one of the participants, "The truth is our lifestyle is a lot of fun, extra fun, 24 hours of drunkenness and everything you know. The township nightlife experience is one that you can never find anywhere else".

### ***Enshrinement? - Engoyameni heritage site***

According to MacCannell's semiotic attraction theory, after the stage of preservation or framing, the site has entered the next stage, enshrinement. At this stage, the tourist attraction is made to contain, within its boundaries, an even more valuable attraction. Part of the development strategies proposed in the Engoyameni nature reserve is the construction of a hiking trail and a craft market, allowing visitors to swim and engage in other adventurous activities. Greenwood (1989:178), in the case study on cultural commodification, suggests that once culture is commodified, "the meaning is gone", implying that when the focus is on commodification, an artefact can lose its cultural meaning. Cohen (2004), however, anticipates a positive effect of cultural commodification, where locals and tourists preserve and delineate cultural authenticity. The hope is that by fine-tuning culture, it may acquire an attribute of 'emergent authenticity' over time. The Inkumba forest and the Nwabi hill at Engoyameni in Umlazi can be classified as cultural heritage sites, with significance for their natural and herbal values. Bachinger & Rau (2019:89) argued that forest-based tourism is attractive because it "reconnects human beings to nature". The explanation of Weldemariam et al. (2017), in a study on the relationship between forest trees and the cultural practices of indigenous people, suggests that the plants, used for medicinal purposes by local communities, can be described as a museum and a cultural tourism attraction. One participant in this study is the grandson of Baba Cele, who has been described as the "founder" of the Inkumba forest, which he established to provide a natural plant reservoir during construction in the area. The maintenance and further cultivation of the forest have also remained with the Cele family, the grandson contending that the intention was to create a Muthi (local medication) mine for the flourishing Muthi market. According to him:

"When my father was building that forest, it is because people are building and constructing houses and malls and things, and they are cutting down trees and plants, and they are not planting again, and if they continue like that very soon, everything is gone, and we do not have any more medicine so my grandfather was planting and planting, and also we do not harvest too much. I teach people who come to me that we do not harvest three bags if we only need one or two. The other will waste, which is not good, so the idea is to ensure that after we harvest today, we can see again to harvest tomorrow. So I am taking them bit by bit, not all at once."

In an attempt to translate the name of the forest called Inkumba, one participant described the forest as a Muthi mine. The forest currently serves as the feeder for the traditional Muthi market in Umlazi and other parts of the province. The forest is one of two natural, cultural attractions in Engoyameni, which members of the Umlazi township tourism board are attempting to turn into a nature reserve, and confirmed that they are in discussions with the management at the City Hall and the area Chief to bring about development and create employment. According to him:

"the idea is to bring about development, create employment and stimulate entrepreneurship. We are not creating a product to sell because it is a lifestyle. If it happens that the tourist is there when it is happening and they see that it is fine, you know, but it is not staged. The Izangomas are also there, so it is not possible to evoke spirits for the fun of it. It is not like something one can switch on and off. Can it be staged? It cannot! You cannot stage that because we have seen in some of the other spaces, especially in town, they curate these things, they stage them, and there is money that is spent there, and the long-term effects of that is that you are really degrading your life culture, you know. And so we are trying to be pro-Ubuntu in everything that we are doing".

The construction and enactment of Engoyameni as a tourist attraction within Umlazi are based on several reasons, which include the desire by the township board to change the narrative that sees the area as a slum that can only showcase poverty:

"What is the first thing you think of when you think of a township? Poverty. You know, yeah, because they are blinding people to thinking that poverty is a commodity. It is not; it is a bad way for us to change. It is not a commodity." (UM04)

The beautiful scenery, peace and quiet of the predominantly rural neighbourhood of Engoyameni have appealed to many Black South Africans who are gradually moving from the city back to their homestead. According to UM03:

"If you buy a house in other places, you are still going to pay rates, but not in the township. Many there do not pay for electricity or water because they drill their own boreholes and have solar panels, so you see, and they have more yards of land for their livestock, cattle, and other things like farming".



The desire to enact this space as a tourist attraction takes root in the need to portray the importance of the political history, showcase the lifestyle of the people, particularly around the Engoyameni area, the lifestyle of the izangoma, the importance of the amakhosi (traditional community leaders) and their role in shaping Umlazi history and their Muthi mine. According to the Umlazi tourism board vice-chairperson, a collaboration is being initiated with the city council and the local Chief to identify an investor who they hope will keep the site's originality. The Inwabi hill is believed to have a mysterious story around it, and according to one of the participants, "In one of those spaces, when you are there, you feel probably God was standing here, and it is just that strong spiritual connection".

#### ***Mechanical and social reproduction: Preserving 'originality'***

The fourth and fifth stages in the semiotic attraction theory, according to MacCannell's semiotic attraction theory, are the mechanical and social reproduction stages. The mechanical reproduction stage is responsible for setting the tourist in motion on his journey to find the object they want to see. This stage involves the creation of prints, photographs, flyers or effigies of the object, which are valued and displayed. The anticipation is that the tourist's expectations on arrival at the destination equal or supersede the experience gained. One of the international tourists interviewed attested that their exploration of Engoyameni was exciting.

“We enjoyed nature during the bush experience. We enter the Hut, and they teach us about the traditional Zulu ways and tell us about the area as well. We also drank the traditional beer, Umqombothi.” (UM08)

The final stage of the sight sacralisation process is the social reproduction stage, which, due to the significantly constructed importance given to the sight, people are proud enough to begin to name themselves after these famous attractions. Based on the responses from participants, the construction and enactment of heritage sites to become tourist attractions is an attempt by local tourism enthusiasts to boost the economic and sociocultural viability of tourism in the township community, the aim being to enhance the township tourism experience for foreign tourists. However, according to Li and Yu (2023), one party cannot determine the tourism experience as it is a multi-party process. The tourism experience must, therefore, be taken in its entirety to explore the construction of the meaning of tourist attractions, with both the sight constructors and the tourists participating in the semiotic construction of tourist attractions. While the organisers design the construction of cultural products as a tourist place to attract foreign tourists, the tourists themselves must assign meanings to them through a series of meaningful experiences at the destination.

Fortunately, the organisers in the construction and enactment of the nature reserve at Engoyameni as a product for foreign consumption have been to create a product that tourists can appreciate. One of the foreign tourists who participated in the study attested that a tour of Umlazi gives a genuine township experience, the attractions being the music, the food (mainly meat) and the rich vibe in the space, which he says cannot be found anywhere else in the world, these being the reasons why he re-visits South Africa, and Umlazi in particular. Describing himself as an African who lives in America, he stated that visiting South Africa without going to the township would cheat oneself of an authentic African experience. Recently, there have been some ethical concerns about the operations and the processes that entail township tourism. Ashworth (2004) contends that the development of township tourism is merely an exploitation of heritage and an exploration of the suffering of others for the pleasure and entertainment of visitors. Other scholars have stated that going to places of abject peri-urban poverty out of inquisitiveness for entertainment is viewed as 'voyeuristic' and ethically problematic (Steinbrink, 2013; Burgold & Rolfes, 2013; Steinbrink & Voshage, 2021). Mazhande & Mamimine (2020) argue that the search for authenticity may have been used as a front to cover up their real motives, which may have been to record and make documentaries of how people in townships are suffering and live in abject poverty. However, Rolfes (2009) postulates that the need by tourists to experience the actual living conditions of the people in a host country goes beyond the claim that they need to go and see poverty, being more a quest to experience the indigenous culture of their host country. Based on empirical engagement with the community, it becomes evident that culture and heritage are viable resources that can be used as tools for township tourism development.

#### **Conclusion**

In South Africa, township tourism is vital to the country's tourism industry. This study helped to gain a deeper understanding of how the township experience of foreign visitors can be improved not just for economic gains but also to increase the sociocultural advantages by promoting enhanced township tourism experiences. Studies have shown that creating a worthwhile experience is not solely the responsibility of the constructor or the consumer of township tourism but rather a shared process that involves both the tourist and tourism attractions constructor. While the tourism promoters (re)construct the signs of a place to build a particular experience at that destination, the tourists, in turn, (re)construct the signs to supply themselves with significance based on their experience. Using MacCannell's semiotic attraction theory as the theoretical lens, the study examines the construction of Engoyameni in Umlazi as a tourism attraction for foreign consumption. Semiotics research has always acknowledged that signs are built through social means. In this study, the construction and enactment of Engoyameni as a touristic site/sight relied on semiotic mechanisms through the process of socially constructed meaning while focusing on understanding and addressing the relevance associated with the natural heritage reserve constructed. The study, therefore, submits that South African township tourism should be more than just a poverty voyage or an opportunity to witness the disadvantages associated with living in these peri-urban spaces. Township tourism should be an avenue that showcases South



Africa's rich and diverse culture and heritage, which is available even in places where one least expects to find it, like high-density, under-developed, sprawling townships.

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