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Overtourism in Cape Town: Local Stakeholder Perspectives

ABSTRACT

Over the past three decades tourism geographers have engaged increasingly with issues of urban tourism and overtourism. The mass of urban tourism scholarship and writings about overtourism concerns cities in the Global North. The novel contribution of this study is documenting evidence of emergent overtourism and the rise of resident discontent in the context of a major urban tourism destination in the Global South, namely Cape Town. The case study scrutinized is of tourism impacts and stakeholder perspectives of the historic inner-city neighbourhood of Bo-Kaap where 22 detailed stakeholder interviews were conducted. The Bo-Kaap manifests the hallmarks of overtourism as documented in several European cities. Touristification is modifying the local residential and business landscape for tourist consumption with the consequence that residents of the neighbourhood are alienated as the space becomes difficult to live in. The findings reveal significant levels of anti-tourist sentiment in the Bo-Kaap which stem from concerns about the local nuisances of tourism expansion and perceived lack of benefits for the neighbourhood. Arguably, critical policy and management challenges confront the City of Cape Town in respect of current directions of tourism development in the Bo-Kaap neighbourhood.

Keywords: Cape Town, overtourism, resident protest, stakeholder perspectives, urban tourism

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INTRODUCTION

As Lörincz et al. (2025, p. 162) point out “throughout history, cities have always been popular destinations for economic, transport, commercial, or strategic reasons, as well as for the cultural and artistic values they offer”. Large cities are significant tourism destinations attracting visitors for different purposes, including leisure, business, health and for visiting friends and relatives (VFR) (Law, 1993; Morrison & Coca-Stefaniak, 2021; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2021a). Within tourism space economies urban places are critical vibrant destinations because of the variety of their tourism assets as well as diverse characteristics (Law, 1996; Morrison & Maxim, 2022). In addition to their large populations which generate substantial VFR travel mobilities, cities boast concentrations of entertainment, leisure, culture, heritage, sports and shopping attractions. According to Maxim (2024, p. 1) the recent worldwide boom in urban tourism has been catalysed by several factors. These include changing work patterns, higher disposable incomes, infrastructure improvements, and the multiple offerings of city destinations. Other factors are the innovation of new smart technologies as well as the role of low-cost airlines which have facilitated city breaks (Vujko et al., 2025). Globally, large city tourism destinations - viewed as crowded places - were severely impacted by COVID-19. Nevertheless, the international record points to a post-pandemic recovery with the reopening of borders and a re-ignition of flows of urban tourists (Amore & Adie, 2021; Maxim, 2024; Wasudawan & Weissmann, 2025).

Undoubtedly, urban tourism represents “one of the most dynamically developing forms of tourism and, in many cases, one of the most important drivers of economic growth” (Panasiuk, 2019, p. 14). Until the 1980s, however, scholarly research on urban tourism was sparse (Page & Duignan, 2023). Only during the 1980s and 1990s did urban tourism appear as a significant and distinctive field of scholarship (Law, 1993, 1996; Novy, 2011). Despite the growth of cities as tourism destinations, for many years urban tourism was an overlooked dimension of tourism studies which was dominated by research on rural spaces or resorts (Nilsson, 2024). Cities were considered mostly as generating sites rather than as reception areas in tourism systems. Over the past three decades attitudes towards urban tourism have changed. There has been a burst of innovative research concerning various dimensions of urban tourism and including significant contributions from tourism geographers (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2021a; Duignan & Pappalepore, 2023; Page & Duignan, 2023; Stalmirska, 2023; Stalmirska & Ali, 2025). This rising academic interest is accounted for not only by the expansion of urban tourism *per se* but also from an acknowledgement of its cultural, economic and social significance and most especially its important ramifications for local livelihoods and urban economic development (Larsen, 2019; Nilsson, 2024).

Maitland and Newman (2009, p. 1) assert that “urban tourism has been an inseparable part of the transformation of many cities over the past several decades”. Using an economic geography lens Romão (2025) positions tourism as a vital catalyst of economic and urban change. Attention is directed at the linkages of urban tourism to gentrification and social conflicts. ‘Touristification’ occurs when tourism becomes the predominant local activity, precipitating changes in urban spaces, especially the complexion of certain physical urban environments with severe impacts often for housing prices as

well as for residents' quality of life (Cocola-Gant, 2018; Larsen, 2019). As leisure tourism overtook city spaces it has therefore become a topic of policy concern and an element in strategic spatial planning (Duignan & Pappalepore, 2023). Critically, tourism development was propelled onto the urban agenda by its transformative impacts in cities, including gentrification and the appearance of resident protests around 'overtourism' (Colomb & Novy, 2016; Novy & Colomb, 2019; Amore et al., 2020; Milano et al., 2020; Horn & Visser, 2023; Koens & Milano, 2024; Nieuwland et al., 2025; Tena et al., 2025). Such developments occurred as reaction to a broader policy environment within which tourism "has been a central component of the worldwide process of neoliberalization" and, in many cities, local tourism policies have been progressively neoliberalized (Fletcher, 2025, p. 466).

Arguably, the mass of urban tourism scholarship currently surrounds city destinations in the Global North (Page & Duignan, 2023). Nevertheless, examining the 'other half' of urban tourism, namely that occurring in the Global South, it is evident many prominent examples exist of cities in Asia (Bangkok, Ho Chi Minh City, Kuala Lumpur, Mumbai, Phuket) and Latin America (Buenos Aires, Lima, Rio de Janeiro) which are significant leisure tourism hubs (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2021a). Across the global map of urban tourism, the region of sub-Saharan Africa is distinctive because of the greater relative significance of business tourism (formal and informal) as a driver for tourism expansion. Indeed, for Addis Ababa, Harare, Nairobi and even Johannesburg the key drivers for urban tourism are business or MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences, exhibitions) tourism rather than traditional leisure tourism (Rogerson, 2018; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2021b; Makoni & Rogerson, 2023).

One striking exception is, however, the city of Cape Town. Under apartheid (1948-1991) international tourist flows to the city were limited, being negatively impacted by boycotts because of South Africa's racial policies and of the racialized character of tourism spaces (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2025). In the post-apartheid (after 1994) period following the dropping of international sanctions and South Africa's reintegration into the global tourism economy, Cape Town's extraordinary natural beauty and attractions made it a bucket-list place to visit for long haul international leisure tourists coming from Europe, North America and increasingly from Asia (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2019). Using indicators of tourism spend Cape Town is South Africa's leading destination accounting for nearly 16 per cent of the national total of value (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2021c). Following the period of COVID-19 impacts and decline, the city's tourism economy rebooted rapidly (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2022; Chetty & Visser, 2025). New direct flights routes to Cape Town from the USA recently have opened. Changes in tourism seasons in part due to climate change have seen an upturn in visitors from China and India. A further trigger for visitor expansion is the increase in cruise liners docking at Cape Town.

The novel contribution of this paper is to interrogate the accelerating concerns in Cape Town about 'overtourism' with a focus on residents and stakeholders of the inner-city neighbourhood of Bo-Kaap. This discussion is situated against the backdrop of the global expansion in the importance of urban tourism, concerns surrounding the impacts of tourism in cities in the Global North, and significant contributions to scholarship by tourism geographers. The study represents the first detailed investigation of overtourism emerging in a city of the Global South. Three further sections of discussion are given. The next section locates the experience of Cape Town within a review of the burgeoning international literature and debates around overtourism. Following a brief discussion of

methodology, the results are presented concerning stakeholder perspectives of tourism development which is occurring in the Bo-Kaap.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Kuščer and Mihalič (2019) the term ‘overtourism’ was coined by Rafat Ali the founder and CEO of Skift tourism intelligence platform, during a study on Iceland’s fast-growing tourism economy. The terminology of ‘overtourism’ was popularized in 2017 as part of mounting concern around tourism excesses (Milano & Koens, 2022). It was observed that media embraced the term overtourism because of its appeal to “people’s basic instincts” and “an element of alarm and fear in it” (Mihalič, 2020, p. 2). This said, it has been argued that in certain respects ‘overtourism’ is not a recent phenomenon because as Sharpley (2020, p. 1940) asserts it “can be considered to be, in some respects, simply a new term for an old phenomenon.” Overtourism debates build upon a long tradition of critiques concerning the myriad negative impacts of conventional mass tourism development.

For Žemla (2020) the initial conceptualization of overtourism was blurred and urban scholars struggled for a commonly-accepted definition. Back et al. (2025, p. 294) opine that whilst overtourism manifests several definitions, it is essentially “a concept that addresses the deterioration of places, experiences and quality of life caused by tourism”. For Koens et al. (2018, p. 9) it can be viewed as “a social problem within a city context”. Consensus exists that overtourism occurs when tourism growth exceeds limits and triggers resentment of tourism (Koens et al., 2018; Milano et al., 2019; Mihalič & Kuščer, 2022; Dodds & Butler, 2024; González-Reverté & Guix, 2024). Barač-Miftarević (2023, p. 179) contends overtourism is “when locals feel that their way of life is disappearing due to tourism” and precipitates “resistance to tourism as a whole, to tourists, decision-makers (all levels of government), and economic entities in the destination”. In a similar manner Pai et al. (2024, p. 796) aver that “When the number of tourists in a destination affects the quality of life of local residents, or the deterioration of the experience exceeds the wishes of local residents over-tourism will affect the social sustainability of the interaction between residents and tourists”. The growth of the sharing economy and of short-term rentals represents a closely overlapping phenomenon with debates around ‘overtourism’ (Moreno-Gil & Coca-Stefaniak, 2020).

Tracing the discourse on overtourism the literature discloses that its causes are multiple, complex and somewhat ambivalent (Balliu & Zbucha, 2025). At one level overtourism is undoubtedly the consequence of uncontrolled development and the absence of good management and planning (Koens et al., 2018). Academic debates surrounding ‘overtourism’ and ‘tourismphobia’ burgeoned across the experience of many European cities including Amsterdam, Barcelona, Berlin, Dubrovnik, Florence, Granada, Krakow, Lisbon, Ljubljana, London, Paris, Seville and Venice (Kuščer & Mihalič, 2019; Milano et al., 2019; Diaz-Parra & Jover, 2021; Pasquinelli & Trunfio 2020; Pechlaner et al., 2020; Barač-Miftarević, 2023). Unquestionably, the unplanned occurrence of overtourism in these and other popular urban destinations is a byproduct of “unregulated capital accumulation and growth strategies heavily associated with selling cities as tourism commodities” (Milano et al., 2019, p. 1857).

A boom in urban tourism often “brings gentrification, leading to property speculation, contributing to the displacement of residents, and impacting the authenticity and social cohesion of historic and emblematic neighbourhoods (Graça et al., 2025, p. 150). In addition, overtourism creates particular challenges for heritage and the conservation of historic neighbourhoods of European cities (Amore et al., 2020; Dodds & Butler, 2024; Alonso, 2025; Graça et al., 2025).

With negative impacts perceived by residents from overtourism common responses have been organized anti-tourist protests (Milano et al., 2019; González-Reverté & Guix, 2024; Graça et al., 2025). It is evident that a tide of local protest and resistance occurs sometimes against the growth of tourism as a whole and of its negative ramifications for residents. In other instances, protest and resistance is triggered against the expansion of specific forms of tourism which are contested or deplored (Colomb & Novy 2016; Back et al., 2025). Overall, Novy and Colomb (2019) attribute this ‘politicisation from below’ as resulting from the impacts of the visitor economy on urban places as well as both the *quantitative* and *qualitative* transformation of urban tourism in recent years. The shifting spatialities of tourism flows in and across city spaces are acknowledged also as a determining factor for residents protesting their alienation from tourism (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2021a; Rogerson et al., 2024). As highlighted by Milano et al. (2024, p. 1313) for the past half-century “neoliberal tourist development plans have been widely prioritized, indistinctively exploiting local resources and spaces for corporate profit”. Under the sway of neo-liberal planning, capital-driven gentrification represents the *modus operandi* of urban growth coalitions. In an important intervention Milano et al. (2024, p. 1318) (re-)conceptualize overtourism as a ‘regime’, meaning “a complex and deeply entrenched system that exerts control over urban landscapes, economies and social dynamics in which tourism economics start to be the main source of income, transforming cities into perpetual holiday destinations”. Specifically, the regime of overtourism can be understood as a multifaceted and self-perpetuating system, that prioritizes economic growth through mass tourism and a visitor economy which is gradually replacing existing economic activities (Milano et al., 2024).

As an aspect of urban tourism, in recent years research concerning overtourism has “increased exponentially” (Back et al., 2025, p. 295). This is documented by the appearance of several recent systematic and bibliographic reviews which identify that the literature on ‘overtourism’ has recorded remarkable growth for urban destinations in the Global North (Veríssimo et al., 2020; Barač-Miftarević, 2023; Santos-Rojo et al., 2023; Back et al., 2025; Dilshan & Nakabasami, 2025; Tamang & Mallick, 2025; Wasudawan & Weissmann, 2025). Most peer-reviewed research on overtourism emerged only as recently as 2018 (Back et al., 2025). Largely, research on overtourism is set within European city contexts albeit recent additions to the literature include at least one non-European case, namely of Kyoto, Japan. Here, Burtis and Wise (2025) interrogate its social, environmental and economic impact upon local communities.

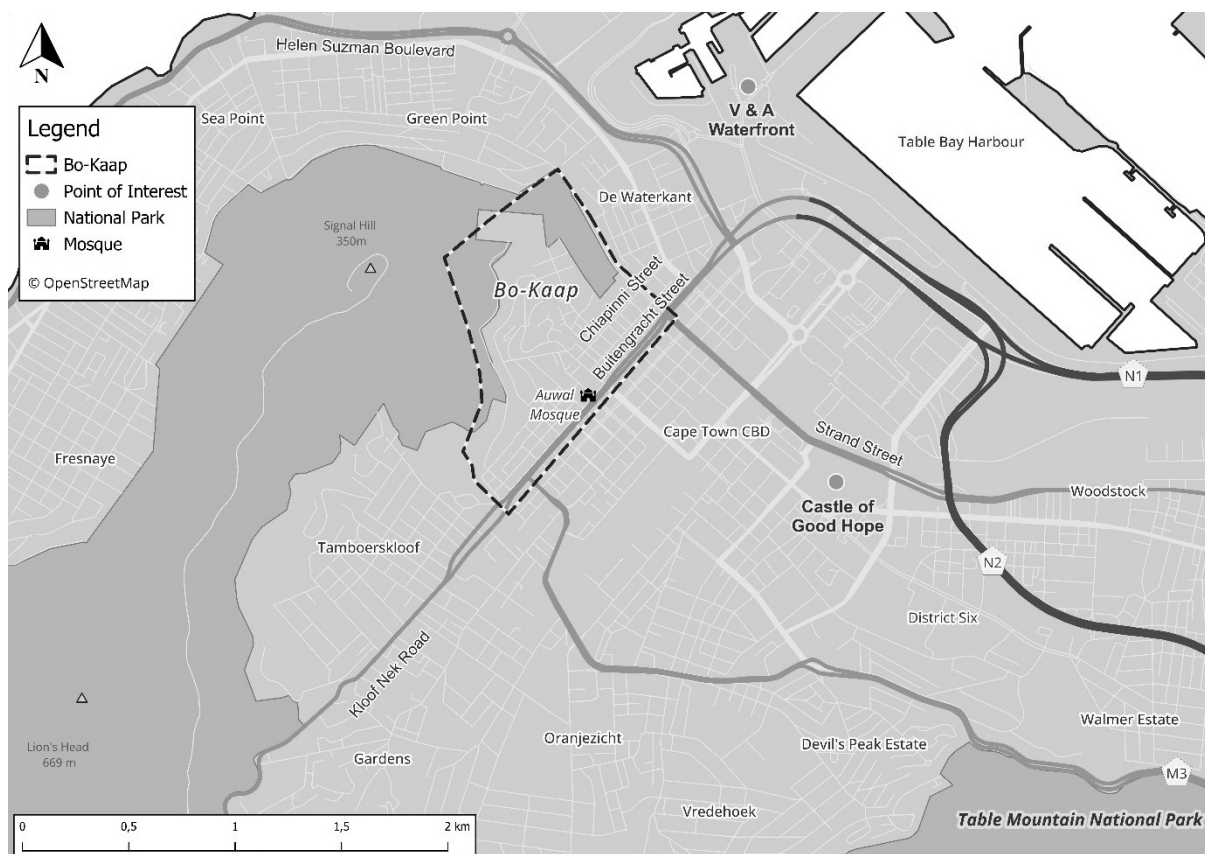
Overall, within the existing body of overtourism literature Back et al. (2025) isolate six key clusters of research. First, is the unpacking of the complex effects of overtourism at local level. Second, is the impact of the sharing economy and short-term rentals on the urban accommodation and property landscape (Moreno-Gil & Coca-Stefaniak, 2020). The third cluster encompasses “research investigating locals’ reactions to overtourism and how tourism affects their everyday lives” (Back et

al., 2025, p. 300). Four, is the impacts of climate change and issues of heritage management. Most especially, researchers have directed concerns about how overtourism impacts city destinations with high cultural and heritage values. Five, is a critical literature on ‘degrowing’ urban tourism and searching for alternatives to the neoliberal model of urban planning and governance. The final group of research works are policy-centred and examine a range of issues around stakeholder perceptions surrounding tourism and of policies addressing overtourism.

METHODS

The case study under scrutiny is of tourism impacts and stakeholder perspectives concerning the Bo-Kaap neighbourhood in Cape Town, South Africa. The use of a single case study often is applied in ‘exploratory studies’ as it seeks to determine the case and key factors (Mouton, 2001). As is pinpointed by Swedberg (2020, p. 16) exploratory studies are devised “to place ourselves within a context of discovery rather than a context of proof”. The approach is inductive, atheoretical and no hypothesis is formulated; rather, a ‘general idea’ guides the empirical research. High construct validity along with in-depth insights and establishing rapport with participants are considered its strengths. By adopting this approach, the task is to provide an in-depth description of the Bo-Kaap case situated in the everyday life-worlds of the actors being studied and thus to generate ‘insider perspectives’ (Mouton, 2001).

Figure 1. The Location of Bo-Kaap in Cape Town Inner-city



Source: Authors

The Bo-Kaap is situated in Cape Town inner-city below the slopes of Signal Hill (Figure 1). This historical settlement was originally built in the 1790s for European artisans and traders and subsequently became a slave quarter of mixed populations upon their emancipation in 1838 (Pistorius, 1994; Kotze, 2013). Colonial rule, global geopolitics and apartheid have shaped and re-shaped the neighbourhood over time (Jessa, 2025). Under apartheid the neighbourhood was formally declared a 'Malay' area in 1957; it constituted the oldest 'non-white' inner-city suburb in South Africa. The contemporary area of Bo-Kaap hosts several heritage sites of national significance and represents a microcosm of 'Cape Coloured' and Muslim culture where socio-religious practices remain demonstrable (Donaldson et al., 2013). This inner-city precinct of Cape Town is the city's foremost cultural tourism asset. For tourists it is distinguished by its vibrant coloured houses, cobblestone streets, and religious culture. The neighbourhood contains the largest concentration of pre-1850s colonial architecture in South Africa making an important contribution to the country's architectural heritage (Pistorius, 1994). The tourist hub and geographical core of Bo-Kaap is situated around Wale, Chiapinni and Rose Streets.

For this investigation 22 semi-structured interviews with various role players and stakeholders were conducted in Cape Town during 2023–2024. These semi-structured interviews were based around broad questions, topics and themes (Bless & Higson-Smith, 2000). Respondents were encouraged to talk about a topic freely, and care was taken to avoid leading (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). The duration of interviews varied between 45 minutes and three hours dependent on the respondent's knowledge of the topic, availability, and willingness to engage with the subject matter. Purposeful sampling allowed for the targeting of participants whose roles often overlapped.

Table 1 lists the respondents and their roles. The interviewed stakeholders included long-term residents, tour guides, lawyers, museum employees, members of local civic organisations, local authority and provincial government. Broad neighbourhood development and policy aspects, together with specific local concerns were discussed with the ward councillor. Aspects of heritage conservation were addressed by respondents from the local authority and civic administrators, heritage practitioners and academics. Tourism development issues were interrogated with tourism managers both at the City of Cape Town and the provincial Western Cape Department of Tourism and Economic Development. Residents and civics provided their perspectives on gentrification and its displacement effects, overtourism, and threats to heritage. The information derived from interviews was collated to determine points of coherence and agreement within community structures. Further evidence of resident views towards local tourism development was obtained through examining Facebook posts.

Ethical considerations were a central aspect of the research design and decision-making processes throughout the project. Given the high media profile of the Bo-Kaap and sensitivity of the research topic, care was taken to conduct the study responsibly. Participants were encouraged to openly reveal their opinions. Informed consent was obtained via email or for some residents, via WhatsApp, or Facebook Messenger. In reporting the findings, the names of participants are omitted to protect participants from potential harm. A full account of data collection procedures, selection of respondents and ethical issues is provided by Jessa (2025).

Table 1: List of Stakeholder Respondents and their Roles

Respondent	Description	Interview Date
A	Ex resident, Bo-Kaap tour guide	26.03.2024
B	Elderly resident of Chiapinni Street	02.03.2024
C	Resident activist and founder of the Bo-Kaap Tourism Association (BTA), resident site guide	24.10.2023
D	Resident activist, BTA founder	22.10.2023
E	Lawyer, Activist, resident, Member of Bo-Kaap Residents Association (BOCRA)	12.02.2024
F	Ward Councillor	20.09.2023
G	Tourism Planning Director, City of Cape Town	18.12.2023
H	Tourism Planning Official, Western Cape Provincial Government	16.03.2024
I	Heritage Planner, City of Cape Town	31.01.2024
J	Heritage Planner, City of Cape Town	31.01.2024
K	Heritage Consultant/ Academic	22.02.2024
L	Heritage Academic/ Mosque board member/ Salt River Heritage Association Member	12.02.2024
M	Elderly resident/ Student Host Chiapinni Street	17.02.2024
N	Resident Tour operator/ Site Guide/ member of BOCRA and BTA	05.02.2023
O	Resident adjacent to informal settlement, home storyteller host, tour guide	24.02.2024
P	Resident, Founder of Bo-Kaap Rise; Business developer; Female Youth Movement member	24.01.2023
Q	Lawyer, Radio host, Curator of local Cape Muslim Slave & Heritage Museum	11.07.2023
R	Long term elderly resident, recently relocated to Northern Suburbs of Cape Town	22.02.2023
S	Bo-Kaap Museum Employee	08.11.2023
T	Long term resident of the informal settlement	21.02.2024
U	Resident of Chiapinni Street	22.03.2024
X	Resident of Dorp Street	07.06.2023

RESULTS

In the post-apartheid period the Bo-Kaap neighbourhood has been experiencing intensifying neighbourhood change (Donaldson et al., 2013; Kotze, 2013; Todeschini & Japha, 2024). Together, expansive economic policies, large-scale urban construction projects and unregulated tourism growth are reshaping the Bo-Kaap community at a physical and human scale (Jessa, 2025). Gentrification and touristification are exerting severe displacement effects, disrupting community life and threatening local cultural heritage (Jessa & Rogerson, 2025). An uneven pattern of development reinforces spatial divisions in the area, a reminder of the historical legacy of exclusion and othering under both colonial rule and apartheid. Currently more than half the population of the Bo-Kaap reside in overcrowded conditions or in informal settlements.

The results from interviews with local stakeholders are organized into two sub-sections of discussion. The first documents the city of Cape Town's neo-liberal pro-growth policies and the advance of tourism gentrification in an urban African setting (cf. Horn & Visser, 2023). The second

turns to controversies about tourism impacts in the Bo-Kaap, resident concerns and the growth of anti-tourism sentiment.

Stakeholder Perspectives: Tourism Gentrification and Neighbourhood Change

Although tourism is a significant driver of neighbourhood change in the Bo-Kaap, this has gone unacknowledged by city and provincial authorities. Moreover, it has not been accorded serious consideration in Cape Town city development frameworks. Indeed, the Cape Town record of tourism planning essentially illustrates the observation made by Paddison and Hall (2024, p. 1) that “tourism policy tends to focus on economic priorities, with little concern shown for addressing the wider impacts of tourism”. The stakeholder interviews disclose that tourism in the Bo-Kaap is identified as a key sector for the local economy, at grassroots levels and for achieving broader economic development goals. This said, tourism development is characterized currently as chaotic and poorly managed.

Residents feel their needs are dismissed, and a resultant sense of loss of control is expressed. As the intensity of tourism increases, so too do negative impacts. The results point to the city authorities lack of responsiveness to key community demands. Bo-Kaap residents therefore castigate the city’s policies for being anaemic and failing to address the local negative impacts of tourism. The findings confirm that a growth focus dominates the City of Cape Town’s development approach. The primary mandate is for economic development and job creation. Despite an acknowledgement of the negative impacts experienced from tourism, these are relegated in favour of quantitative growth.

Respondent J: *For Cape Town, tourism is the goose that laid the golden egg.*

Respondent D: *The City Council sees tourism as a means to an end in itself. The greater the footfall, the more money they make.*

Respondent F: *When considering tourism as a driver of gentrification... the focus for me is to create jobs, this is imperative, and tourism is a major driver... We can’t deny that the Bo-Kaap is part of the CBD, is part of the city and the Bo-Kaap is a huge attraction.... Even if benefits don’t reach the community directly, it doesn’t mean it isn’t benefitting the city. These guests have to stay in hotels and visit other attractions too, so they are contributing.*

Respondent H: *It is the Provincial government’s primary objective to grow jobs and the economy through tourism. This is integrated into much of the city’s planning and thinking. Tourism is one of the few growth sectors, seen as low hanging fruit, and is leveraged to address development goals.*

Overall, while some residents understood the motivations behind the city’s growth-centred approach, they contest the lack of collaborative efforts and claim the city authorities are underhanded and unfairly competitive.

Respondent C: *We say, we get what you want to do. Look don’t be so sly about it. It’s cool. We know, you as a city need to increase revenue and compete in the world economy and all that. But we are your best partners to partner up with!*

Although there is no dispute as to the visitor marketability of the Bo-Kaap, divergent opinions were expressed on factors boosting the area's increasing popularity. Certain respondents contended the Bo-Kaap is 'sold' worldwide via targeted marketing campaigns and residents bear the cost of increasing tourist numbers, a situation largely outside of their control. Some respondents believe that the marketing (and increasing visitor numbers) of the Bo-Kaap has evolved a life of its own as a result of social media. Another suggested that visitor numbers have been driven by media campaigns by the city and tourism authorities.

Respondent C: *When you come off international arrivals at Cape Town airport - Boom, you see a Bo-Kaap ad. What does it tell you? The city is sending people to explore. The Cape Town Tourism website showcases the Bo-Kaap as its number one cultural destination. In fact, the City of Cape Town cannot be promoted anywhere worldwide without them using an image of Bo-Kaap. The message is that you've got to go to Bo-Kaap as a tourist.*

Respondent F: *Whether the City pushed the image of Bo-Kaap or not you would find its picture on Instagram and international travel magazines in much the same way as other destination experiences such as the Sydney Opera House. It is something that happens organically.*

The Bo-Kaap forms an inseparable part of the Cape Town tourism product offering. The neighbourhood usually is included on scheduled city tour itineraries with other 'must-see' attractions such as Table Mountain and the Victoria and Alfred waterfront development. Private walking tours that include visits to residents' homes are booked via independent travellers either directly or through tour agencies which offer the Bo-Kaap as a 'cultural experience' rather than as brief photo-stop. In addition, the area is a popular film set for both local and international advertisements. In response to Israel's invasion of Gaza many residents crafted distinctive pro-Palestine images on their homes designed to raise international awareness of the genocide taking place. The intent, as expressed by residents, was to have a Palestinian flag on every tourist social media post made of the Bo-Kaap.

Several respondents felt tourism was exclusionary to some groups in the area, most notably the residents of the informal settlement of Schotchkloof Flats. Others identified the exclusionary loss of community as experienced due to increased tourism activity.

Respondent A: *Honestly, I think that other than the erosion of culture and communal spirituality, there is no question that another one of the direct consequences of tourism, is people are being excluded.*

Respondent K: *Especially around the heritage trail they are proposing. They continue to create privilege. So depending on where you live ...some segments will be well-resourced and sustainable and others not, or will require capital injection, that may not build sustainability.*

It was recognized that tourism by its very nature was exclusionary. Several respondents decried the tourist-centric development view of the city authorities and instead argued the case for adopting a resident-centred approach that might ensure greater benefits for future generations of Bo-Kaap residents.

Respondent H: *It's the nature of tourism that benefits would be unequally distributed. This is a global issue. How many people in the community have adopted tourism?*

Respondent C: *I would like my kids to grow up and at least have some chance of doing the same job that I did in Bo-Kaap so they can participate in the economy of teaching that narrative to guests in the form of tours which they earn a living from.*

A strong theme among stakeholders was of the imperative for developing the Bo-Kaap first for the benefit of residents and locals. This stance was exemplified by the following statements from heritage consultants and a representative of the Bo-Kaap Tourism Association.

Respondent K: *If you develop the City for tourists, its fake - Disneyfied. You need to keep on chucking resources at the development. It creates untold conflict with locals. Absolutely...but also to keep the myths going, because what you're doing with that is taking the little that you know and packaging it as a tourism product. In the meantime the community is living their lives and then it becomes a whole performance of identity thing.*

Respondent D: *Develop products in the Flats- According to what I would consider what attracts a tourist? So I put myself back in the shoes of the tourist. We don't want the same shops you can find overseas, the same brands everywhere. They want to go into communities and want to see the story of the Bo-Kaap and the townships, the fisherman and so on, allow us in! Have the privilege to enter into people's homes and be enthralled and fascinated by the story that they've got to tell me, and it etches in the stone of my memory, a story which is rich which is powerful. Sure, you get tourists who just want the surface stuff but I think people don't want to say they went to Starbucks in Cape Town!*

Most respondents agreed the adoption of tourism by residents would progressively continue as a driver of neighbourhood change, particularly as alternative local economic opportunities are limited. At least one respondent rejected 'self-gentrification', arguing that if the predominant form of ownership is local, communities could find a pathway to prosperity through tourism, and this would be a positive outcome rather than gentrification.

Respondent C: *I think there are more people coming into the fold of realizing that economic empowerment is the only way out, or is the only way in, you know and to remain here, and tourism is that vehicle. But we are still trying to establish a more primary mindset of 'I need to empower myself'. The obvious or the easiest option is right in front of us. It is tourism.*

Respondent E: *If they're predicting that (communities will self-gentrify), then I'm saying let those guest houses and restaurants be in the names of our people and bless them...My issue is this. If our people benefit, it's not gentrification. It's a natural phenomenon of economic development. Bo-Kaap is not always gonna' stay the way it is, but keep the working class, take them on the tourism journey, don't leave them behind.*

Stakeholder Perspectives: Tourism Impacts and Resident Concerns

The ‘touristification’ of the Bo-Kaap is most in evidence around the core intersection of Wale and Chiapinni Street (Jessa & Rogerson, 2025). On a daily basis from 8am this space becomes busy with tourists and congested with traffic, most especially from tourist coaches (Figure 2). As a consequence of the expansion of tourism around this hub where formerly there were homes, residents have been displaced. Tourism gentrification has resulted in homes being replaced by a mixture of art shops, curio sellers, restaurants as well as home-based tourism offerings (Figures 3–4).

Figure 2. Stream of Large Coaches in Wale Street (Image, Sirhan Jessa, 11.10.2023)



Figure 3. Art Gallery and Curio Seller, Wale & Chiapinni Street (Image, Sirhan Jessa, 10.11.2024)



During 2018 resident dissatisfaction burst into the open. With unregulated tourism disrupting everyday life in the area and the City of Cape Town’s approval of large-scale property developments Bo-Kaap protestors burned tyres and blocked the entrance to the heritage precinct. Entry was refused both to

tour coaches and construction vehicles (Jessa, 2025). The research interviews conducted in 2023-2024 disclosed continued and significant levels of local resentment towards tourism and its impacts in the precinct.

Figure 4. Photographic Gallery and Art Shop in Wale Street (Image, Sirhan Jessa, 10.11.2024)



Resident complaints largely focused on the nuisance generated by inadequate traffic management (especially tour coaches and shuttles in Wale Street), unruly tourist behaviour, the inconvenience imposed by film crews and filming permits granted by city authorities, and the lack of direct economic benefits to the community from substantial levels of tourist activity. The community is attentive to concerns about overtourism and extremely resentful at the City of Cape Town's abdication of responsibility and lack of policy action. Respondents expressed feelings of loss of control, despondency and of reaching a psychological breaking point.

Respondent A: *Tourism (in the Bo-Kaap) is a mess. The City doesn't want to acknowledge it!*

Respondent C: *It's not being addressed in any of the policies, any of the initiatives that the City are rolling out. There is absolutely no meaningful long-term plan for tourism in the area. Everyone is asking questions that are always to do with the same thing ie. tourism. It is something that is a big elephant in the room and in most cases it's not being addressed.*

Although City officials acknowledged the undesirable impacts of excessive tourism, the challenges of curtailing tourism growth were highlighted:

Respondent F: *...but I am concerned- overtourism is being experienced, and all over the world! There is a fine line and finding that balance and protecting our communities so that do not feel over-exposed or taken advantage of. Commodifying our history, our culture and those things that make us unique is what attracts tourists so it is important that we preserve that.*

Respondent H: *It (anti-tourist sentiment) is a global challenge. Tourism plays a big role in job creation; this is the ultimate aim. But we do realise that there are social, economic and environmental impacts such as gentrification. There has been a concern around gentrification and of*

course tourism does play a role in that. It just becomes expensive for locals. We are committed to sustainable tourism development, but are aware of the concerns.... The main directive is to grow the economy. Tourism is a primary thrust of government.

Respondent J: I was shocked at the section around Atlas spice shop. It's become so fake and horrible. Masses of tourists get dropped off, I couldn't even shop for spices there anymore, so I just left.

Figure 5. Tourists Visiting Atlas, South Africa's Oldest Spice Shop (Image, Sirhan Jessa, 10.10.2023)



Figure 5 illustrates the impact of tourism on established businesses in Bo-Kaap with the example of the oldest spice shop in the country. Seemingly, City of Cape Town officials are ambivalent towards the negative impacts of excessive tourism and explained that a ‘balanced approach’ to tourism development required compromise by Bo-Kaap residents. The following comments illustrate the opposing positions of city authorities versus residents who expressed a sense of powerless in dealing with tourism’s disruption of everyday life in the area.

Respondent G: To the lady living in Chiapinni Street, she has to unfortunately try to deal with the increasing tourist numbers in a mature way realising that her fellow community members are receiving a livelihood from these tourists. Respectful interactions with neighbours are important.

Respondent R: I am used to it but I wish that for one morning I could sleep late especially on the weekend. I can't even sit outside and enjoy the morning because from early in the day I have to hear these loud foreign voices outside my door. They have no consideration and even come up on to my stoep. I wish there was just one day break that, just one day when there are no tourists, and I can have a peaceful morning.

Respondent B: What can I do? I have to make peace with it, it's a nuisance but there is nothing I can do.

Respondent P: *(Pre- Covid) I was living in Bo Kaap. My family home is there. I used to hang out at friend's place on the corner of Wale and Rose street. We observed it becoming progressively busier. Over time I just noticed how intense the tourism was becoming. I guess my anger, frustration and concern grew.*

It was evidenced that elderly residents of the tourist hub of Chiapinni Street find it especially difficult to cope with the incessant droves of tourists in the neighbourhood's narrow streets and the regular professional photoshoots offered on Airbnb Experiences. For Bo-Kaap residents, tourism has become an overwhelming burden with little means, or hope to improve the situation. Tourist activity continues to expand as indicated by the continuous flow of bookings for walking excursions, food tours and the daily trail of coaches and tourist shuttles frequenting the area (see Figure 6).

Figure 6. Typical Traffic Congestion in Wale Street (Image, Sirhan Jessa, 11.10.2023)



Unfettered growth fuels continued resident frustration, as the balancing costs and benefits of tourism, and of keeping all interest groups satisfied becomes an ever more difficult challenge for Cape Town city authorities. With the regular stream of tourist coaches and shuttles entering the neighbourhood, the urgency for improved traffic management emerged as a strong driver of negative resident sentiment toward tourism (Figure 6). Residents feel their repeated requests for a solution have been dismissed. The frustration at the intensity of traffic, disregard for rules, increased pollution, and danger to pedestrians was highlighted by resident respondents as well as in Facebook comments and responses. The absence of a co-conceived, coherent traffic management plan underscores the City's inability to address the issue meaningfully. In particular, the large coach or bus services are identified as major causes of congestion.

Respondent C: *Bus drivers have the attitude of they bring tourists here so you must be happy. Never mind them blocking the parking areas and causing congestion in Wale Street.*

Respondent E: *The carbon footprint, buses and taxis and everything you know coming into the area and so the traffic damages the cobblestones. Many residents have asthma from all the pollution. As residents we need regulation for this.*

Respondent F: *Those big tour buses frustrate me that come and park in the middle of Wale Street, block traffic, don't adhere to parking rules, and drop off hordes of tourists who stand in the middle of the road and don't spend money at local businesses.*

Several noise complaints relating to unruly tourists were posted on the Facebook community forum. Respondents flagged the need for a tourist code of conduct and the education of tourists about appropriate local behaviour. One official (tourism) response, however, was that residents should compromise as they themselves could be equally noisy during cultural practices for a local carnival.

Respondent G: *Remember it's not just foreigners who make a noise, while they may party some nights, other nights it is community members making a noise such as late-night practicing of the klopse [minstrel] troupes.*

Respondent A: *Selective hearing is employed when comes to noise as no complaints are made when the klopse is practicing or when there are other community events. Those who live on Wale Street have chosen to live on a main road. Tourism benefits the community. These residents have no right to tell tour guides to be quiet.*

Generally, it is evidenced that Bo-Kaap residents express discontent and frustration at the poor management of tourism. Several tour guides experienced some degree of aggression from residents, ranging from leers and dirty looks to direct comments. Resident suggestions to oppose tourism included re-painting white all the multi-coloured houses of Bo-Kaap, spraying tourists with water sprinklers, charging for photographs, and erecting signage asking tourists to be quiet. The growth of youth crime and pickpocketing of tourists also was raised. Reference was made in interviews to the anti-tourist protests that occurred in Bo-Kaap in 2018

Respondent C: *It's very likely that it could get to that point if the steps are not taken to divert the narrative, right now.*

Respondent D: *It will go back to the overtourism of 2018. It's already almost there. The people from the Flats have not been included and these kids are already speaking their truth behind closed doors and they may come down to pickpocket tourists and so on.*

The response of tourism officials to the potential for anti-tourist protests was that international visitors would readily find alternatives to the Bo-Kaap with reduced benefits to all.

Respondent G: *Well then, tourists will just go somewhere else, and like community members felt it during COVID they will quickly feel the impact of no income. Tourists will just go to other sites. There is so much on offer in Cape Town..*

Respondent H: *A blanket ban will have an impact on local tourism businesses who survive and thrive on tourism.*

FaceBook posts indicated the offence felt by residents of 'disrespectful' tourists who take photographs without permission. One respondent made clear the point that in Islam the photography of uncovered women is forbidden. Several respondents expressed the view that they were being Disneyfied, reduced to 'animals in a zoo' where privacy and the right to sit in peace outside your house no longer was available. Other resident concerns related to the 'inappropriate' dress of tourists and requests for more conservative dress especially around places of worship in the area. Certain respondents re-iterated the need for a code of conduct.

Respondent P: Tourists need to respect our values. We are adapting to tourist tastes without the tourists really adapting to us. Using the Auwal mosque as an example... people are not expected to cover themselves like they are elsewhere in the world (in Thailand for instance when going into a temple). I agree that the City and tour operators need to contribute to a changing narrative on the Bo-Kaap which is less shallow than colourful houses and educate tourists to be more respectful and thereby attract the type of tourist you want too.

Uneven benefits from tourism emerged as another strong theme from many resident respondents. One considered that Cape Town Tourism (the city Destination Marketing Organisation), is shirking its responsibility for the proper management of tourism. Analysis of a large volume of Facebook responses shows discontent with a tourism system which according to commentators, is 'exploitative' (Jessa, 2025). Residents largely feel that the costs of tourism outweigh the benefits. Some respondents pinpoint service issues such as cleaning and maintenance while others question where the revenue from tourism goes. The official response indicates budget shortages are responsible for a seeming lack of service delivery.

Respondent C: Cape Town Tourism does nothing to manage the number one cultural asset that they have...They're not spending their time to make sure those visitors are safe or that residents are protected. We have to do it. They're not spending a dime to clean the neighbourhood after the visitors leave. We have to do that.

Respondent E: Tourism is also about heritage and the value that we bring. I don't see the Bo-Kaap getting the value for what we are getting in terms of tourism. I don't see residents benefitting in a meaningful way, being able to send their kids for education to improve livelihoods and so on.

Respondent F: As the City of Cape Town we have such diverse needs, but also people... we have to be able to provide services to everybody....they're not getting a disservice. I don't think that's the case at all. The budget is being stretched a lot thinner.

Respondent Q: I have an issue with all those tourists that contribute nothing to the Bo-Kaap. They come and take their photos, get back in the vehicle and f... off.

Discontent was voiced also about the limited benefits from the rising number of film shoots in the area. Residents expressed frustration at being inconvenienced by film shoots, the invasion of their privacy, lack of appropriate notice and communication by the City, and the absence of local benefits.

Respondent P: *Where does the money go that gets paid to film in the Bo-Kaap...there is some sort of fee that gets paid to be able to film... it happens so often, but no-one ever sees it. Where does the money go?*

The use and sale of liquor in the Bo-Kaap was a further contentious issue. The community made repeated requests for Bo-Kaap to be a liquor-free or 'dry area'. Concern was especially about the youth having access to alcohol and drugs. The declaration of a 'dry area' was intended to make a statement of the area's moral position against substance abuse. An overwhelming number of new liquor applications which the civic has to oppose legally was noted as of concern.

Respondent E: *There have been numerous liquor applications. People don't want to have restaurants because you can't sell liquor. But my issue is that the uniqueness of Bo-Kaap, not just because it's Muslim but we recognise liquor is a problem especially for our youth so we want to keep it out of our area as long as we can.*

Overall, the results clearly demonstrate widespread community discontent at the state of current tourism operations and that for Bo-Kaap residents the costs of tourism expansion currently outweigh the benefits.

CONCLUSIONS

It has been observed that research on "the phenomenon of overtourism and its socio-economic impacts is essential for understanding the challenges faced by tourist destinations worldwide" (Graça et al., 2025, p. 152). Currently, however, the international scholarship on overtourism is conducted overwhelmingly in the context of city destinations in the Global North (Milano & Koens, 2022; Jessa & Rogerson, 2025; Tamang & Mallick, 2025). This paper responds to the call made recently in a state-of-the art review of overtourism research for a broadening focus for tourism geographical research investigations, including a wider range of geographical settings (Back et al., 2025). The novel contribution made by this study has been to document emergent issues of overtourism and the growth of resident discontent in the context of a major urban tourism destination in the Global South.

Arguably, Cape Town provides an appropriate geographical setting for this investigation in light of the city's rapid rise to become one of the leading urban tourism destinations of the Global South (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2021a, 2021c). It has been demonstrated that the inner-city neighbourhood of Bo-Kaap manifests the hallmarks of overtourism similar to those which have been well-documented in European cities (cf. Kuščer & Mihalič, 2019; Amore et al., 2020; Koens & Milano, 2024; Milano et al., 2024; Graça et al., 2025). The significance of tourism's potential to drive economic growth in Cape Town and improve local livelihoods is acknowledged. Nevertheless, there is a stark disparity between the benefits of growth and the perceived lack of direct or equitable distribution of benefits which accrue to the community of Bo-Kaap, where tourism has become the dominant economic activity. With the march of rapid urban transformation, residents are increasingly frustrated with current conditions of tourism development and experience a loss of community and sense of place.

As the Bo-Kaap neighbourhood becomes increasingly commodified elderly residents were found to be especially vulnerable and convey a sense of powerlessness and despondency with regard to these issues.

The critical policy and management challenge for the City of Cape Town authorities is to ensure that tourism benefits are distributed among residents while retaining the unique heritage and cultural identity of the Bo-Kaap neighbourhood. The results pinpoint that gentrification in the Bo-Kaap is, to a degree, driven by tourism (Jessa & Rogerson, 2025). Indeed, in common with findings recorded elsewhere, touristification is modifying the local residential and business landscape to cater for tourist consumption with the consequence that for long term residents of the neighbourhood the space becomes difficult to live in (Cocola-Gant, 2018; Alonso, 2025). The results highlight also the exclusionary and (increasingly) divisive nature of tourism impacts in Bo-Kaap. Especially, those residents from less-skilled and financially disadvantaged segments, such as in areas of informal settlement, require support for inclusion. The interviews reveal significant levels of anti-tourist sentiment in the Bo-Kaap are stemming from nuisance and perceived lack of commensurate benefits which are key concerns. The current social cost of tourism for many residents outweighs the economic benefits derived. Accordingly, in final comment, it is evident that immediate, purposeful actions and policy shifts are required to enhance the overall management of tourism and its directional pathways in Cape Town's historic Bo-Kaap neighbourhood.

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