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## A great place and not yet another declining small town: The case of Clarens, South Africa

Rural urban migration results in rural decline as well as in congested cities, but how can towns avoid this fate and also intercept these migrants on their way to the cities in search of perceived better opportunities? Tourism development can play a central role in the development of rural areas in South Africa, and Clarens is a success story in this regard. This research investigates what made a tourist town such as Clarens succeed whereas other towns faltered and failed. Data was collected using three dif-

ferent questionnaires: one for each target group to cover a broad spectrum of stakeholders in the tourism milieu of Clarens. The research indicates that allowing multinational enterprises in a small tourist town is something that should be considered carefully because it might disturb a small town's ambience.

**Keywords:** planning, small towns, tourism, second homes

## 1 Introduction

“The decline of towns is a common phenomenon. Since larger centres have strong economic bases and offer higher order services these cities attract people” (John, 2012: 4). The question is what towns should do to intercept migrants on their way to larger centres in search of perceived better opportunities (Donaldson, 2007; Reynolds & Antrobus, 2012). There has been a global change and a restructuring in the local economy as a result of migration from rural areas to cities. This leads to rural decline and congested cities (United Nations Human Settlements Programmes, 2013). This, in turn, has a spiral effect, because less capital means fewer opportunities for economic growth in towns. Declining towns are characteristic of both developing countries and first-world countries. This phenomenon extends beyond economic, social and political borders (Van der Merwe et al., 2005; Qayi, 2013).

The South African government announced a rural development plan in 2009 aimed at renewing rural areas (Department of Rural Development and Land Reform of the Republic of South Africa, 2009; Qayi, 2013). In such an endeavour, the role of planning is most important in structuring and implementing proper guidelines for management (Marais & Atkinson, 2006; Nel, 2013). Since the first democratically elected government came into power in 1994, small, medium, and micro-enterprises have been promoted through government policy (Rogerson, 2013). A South African asset is its potential for tourism (Visser, 2005; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2014). Tourism development can play a central role in the development of rural areas in South Africa if it is managed effectively and efficiently. South Africa’s natural beauty, diversity and value for money,<sup>[1]</sup> render it an ideal tourism destination, not only for international tourists, but for South African tourists as well (Government of South Africa, 1996). The domestic tourism market is a tourist segment that often is overlooked but plays an important role in the South African context (Sharpley & Tefler, 2002). Tourism is a catalyst of development that is extremely useful in helping selected towns develop an economic base (Binns & Nel, 2002). Tourism in South Africa’s Free State province is seldom a focus point due to a perception that the province lacks tourism potential. Planners, however, may change this by taking up their role in tourism development as a local economic empowerment catalyst. Planners should strive to preserve and protect natural assets because these features keep tourists coming back (Binns & Nel, 2002). Tourism development in towns tends to be the result of development by default, rather than the outcomes of strategies employed by the government and successful planning.

The hypothesis of this research was therefore that, by understanding why a tourist town such as Clarens succeeds whereas



Figure 1: The Maluti Mountains (photo: Antoinette Nel).

other towns falter and fail, town and regional planners can improve the outcomes of small-town development. The goal of the study was therefore to determine whether tourism is a major factor contributing to the success of a town. To investigate the impact of tourist spending on the local economy of a small town, a mixed methods approach, using qualitative and quantitative data collection, was used. Tourists’ perceptions were examined to determine whether increased development might threaten the appeal of a small town and to assess the potential for enhancing the small-town tourism market. Tourism-related businesses were also approached for their perspectives on tourism and planning for the future. The purpose of the data collection was therefore to determine the role that planning can play in ensuring the viability and growth of a small town dependent on tourism for its future existence.

## 2 General background

Clarens is a small town near the scenic Maluti Mountains in the eastern part of the landlocked Free State province. The town itself has a typical South African town layout because there is a former “white” town and a “black” township. The “black” township on the outskirts is known as Kgubetswana. The Abolition of the Racially Based Land Measures Act of 1991 made it possible for all races to choose without restrictions where they want to live (Rex et al., 2014). The town has a traditional grid layout and is in the governmental jurisdiction of the Dihlabeng Local Municipality, together with the regional centre of Bethlehem, a neighbouring town, as well as three other smaller towns. Clarens is accessible from Bloemfontein, the capital of the Free State province (Donaldson et al., 2014); Gauteng, the economic powerhouse of the country, and Durban, the largest city in the KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) province, by tarred roads that are in good condition – not something to be taken for granted in South Africa. The improvement of the road network between Clarens and the former QwaQwa

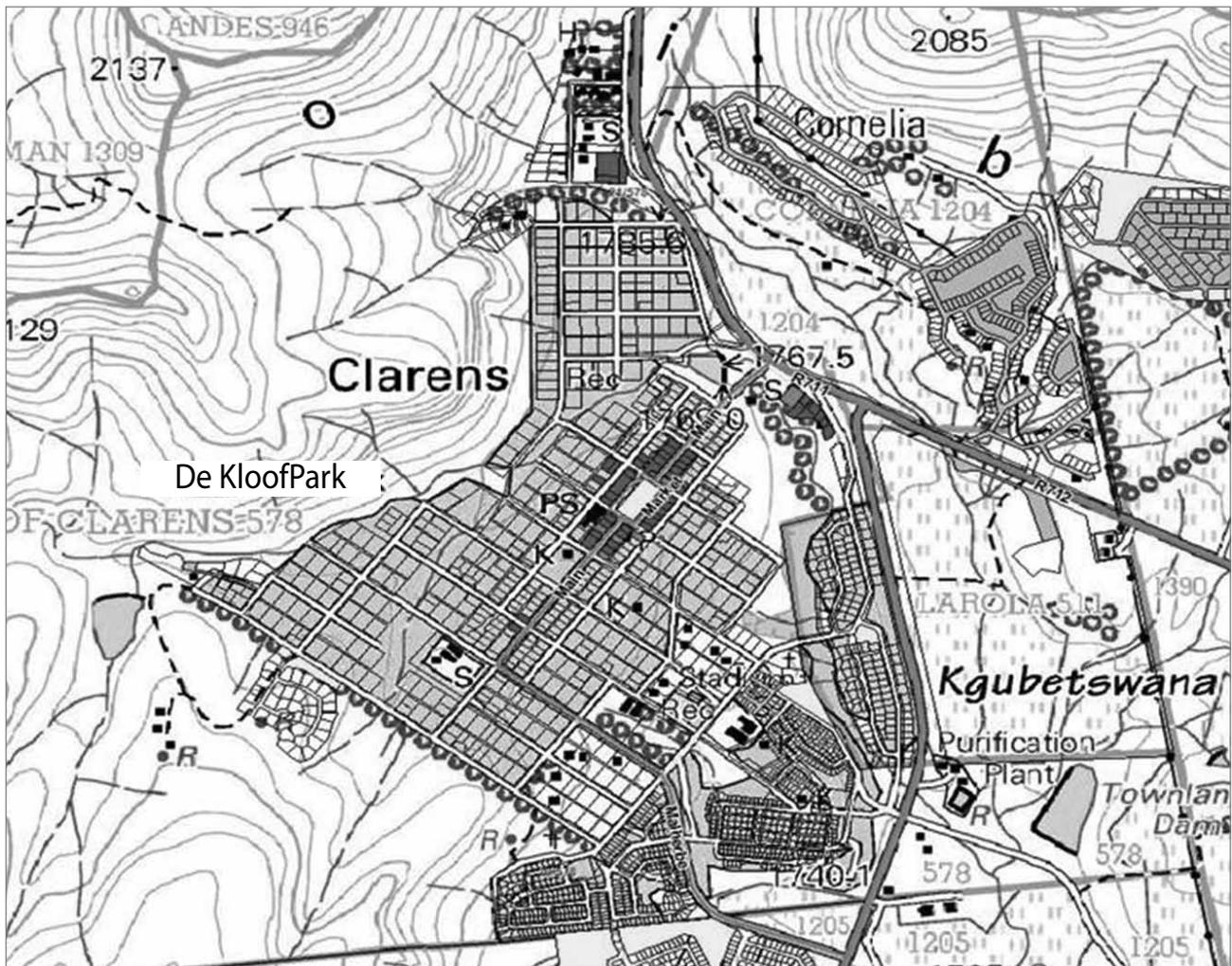


Figure 2: Clarens's town layout (source: Grabe, 2014).

independent homeland, as well as the road between Clarens and the neighbouring town of Fouriesburg, has played an important role in increased access from various destinations.

Clarens was established in 1912 as a retirement town. The town retained its retirement character until 1985, when the potential for tourism was realised. Until the mid-1980s, the town had approximately 200 residents and currently the town hosts up to 30,000 residents during Easter weekend, according to some estimates (Marais, 2004). Several historical phases signify the development of Clarens, namely: the phase of Clarens as a retirement village, the phase of capital injection from outside, and the Lesotho Highlands Water Project phase. From 1912 to 1985, during the phase of "Clarens as a retirement village," agriculture was the main economic activity. The town was generally regarded as a retirement village due to the small number of people residing there and, although Clarens still has an agricultural component, most of the farming activities are now conducted in the larger centre of Bethlehem. "On most of the farms outside Clarens business has been

shifted to tourism due to livestock theft that occurred due to the town's close proximity to the Lesotho border" (Maritz, 2015: interview). The first capital injection from outside the Free State province came between 1985 and 1989. In 1985, a businessperson from Gauteng, Bruce Weyers, started buying properties in Clarens with the vision that someday in the future it would develop into a tourism destination. Soon other entrepreneurs followed suit, buying properties for as little as ZAR 2,000.<sup>[1]</sup> Currently, the value of vacant plots in Clarens is estimated at between ZAR 500,000 and ZAR 1 million, and the retirement image of the little town has disappeared forever. Although Clarens now has become a tourist destination, at the time of the capital injection residents were unsure what would happen to their home town, and conflict ensued between the residents and those buying property (Marais, 2004). This conflict is still evident, but to some extent has taken a new shape due to corporate developers establishing a golf course outside Clarens and a multi-storey chain-brand hotel inside the town. In South African small towns, the former liquor-focused budget hotel has been replaced by other forms of

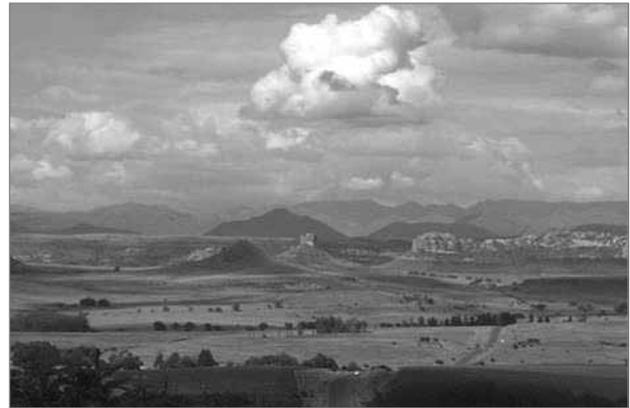


**Figure 3:** Students and staff visiting the Katse Dam in Lesotho (photo: Maléne Campbell).

accommodation (Rogerson, 2013). In an interview, Lodewyk “Louw” Van Biljon (2014), a locally based spatial planner and environment impact assessor, said that “many residents now claim that this is spoiling their view and the ambiance of the previously unspoilt beautiful and unique landscape.”

The Lesotho Highlands Water Project heralded the next phase in the development of Clarens. This project required the construction of a tunnel from the Katse Dam in Lesotho to the Ash River just outside of Clarens (the same river is used for adventure activities such as white-water rafting). Although other neighbouring towns such as Ficksburg also benefited from the construction of this tunnel, Clarens benefited from the decision for it to serve as the headquarters for the teams involved in building the tunnel. This required the construction of housing units in 1990. As a result of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project, additional infrastructure was needed to support the project. The infrastructure was paid for by the Lesotho Highlands Water Project because the local community would never have been able to afford such comprehensive developments at that stage. The rapid population growth of Kgubetswana between 1985 and 1991 also can be attributed to the Lesotho Highlands Water Project. The project had two prominent influences on the development of Clarens. First, the concomitant activities brought skilled foreign workers to the area, changing the character of the Afrikaans-dominated town to one in which foreigners needed to be accommodated. This led to the second influence: a larger and more diverse market. This aided the development of Clarens because foreign capital was invested through various economic activities and needs. The increased number of foreigners played a significant part in the diverse population seen in the town today (Marais, 2004).

After the completion of the project, the international labourers left Clarens, plunging the town into a recession. This was largely because the economic infrastructure was built around the provision of goods and services to international labourers. However, this resulted in innovative entrepreneurs embarking on promoting Clarens as a unique and favourable geta-



**Figure 4:** Eastern Free State scenery (photo: Anneen Maree).

way destination. The outcome of the marketing campaign was restaurants and bed-and-breakfast establishments springing up like mushrooms in Clarens. During this time, artists took advantage of the opportunity to establish themselves in Clarens because it provided a beautiful setting to work in and from. They opened galleries and studios, selling art at prices unheard of in the metropolitan mainstream. In effect, the Clarens setting provided a ready market for selling art and other craft products, and the existing restaurants expanded their menus and additional outdoor activities flourished. This explosion in economic activities attracted more art and leisure entrepreneurs to the town, expanding and stimulating the growth of local tourism (Hoogendoorn & Visser, 2004). The development of 123 sectional title properties, all targeting second-home investors, increased the housing stock by some 40%. This implies that investors and second-home owners see Clarens as an ideal tourist destination. The role of second-home development is significant for development in Clarens because it constitutes 17% of the number of homes in the town. Of the 650 housing structures in Clarens, 281 are permanent houses, and 369 are informal structures. The 17% of second homes corresponds to forty-seven of the 281 permanent houses. The economic influence of these second homes in Clarens is significant. The number of second homes in Clarens makes the town one of the few Free State towns with such a high percentage of second-home ownership (Hoogendoorn & Visser, 2004).

It is clear that Clarens has developed into and is flourishing as an established tourist town. Most of the economic activities are primarily concerned with or affiliated in some way or another with tourism. Clarens has been established as a well-known tourist destination with various tourism activities on offer. These include a wide variety of art galleries and craft shops, a number of hiking trails, places of historic importance, 4×4 trails, river rafting, fly fishing, abseiling, horse riding, yoga, mountain biking and various other sports facilities. In an interview (Grabe 2014), a locally based spatial planner said that “Clarens boasts thirty-five restaurants, more than one hun-

dred accommodation establishments and approximately one thousand beds available to tourists or other holiday seekers.” The town is blessed with vertical cliffs forming part of the Rooiberg Mountain Range, and the region is also close to the Drakensberg Mountains. The entire area has an idyllic character with the cliffs forming a romantic setting for the little town in the valley below. The region receives good rainfall throughout the year, which creates panoramic grassland pastures on the landscape slopes. The hills also have attractive hiking trails and offer other outdoor activities such as abseiling and rock climbing. The Ash River contributes to the scenic environment, and adventurous white-water rafting takes place there.

### 3 Methodology

To be able to determine possible threats that must be addressed and to identify opportunities with the potential to expand the tourism industry, all tourism-related enterprises in Clarens were examined. This is vital because tourism development is a local economic empowerment catalyst and the income from the Clarens tourism industry is about ZAR 200 million per year. To assess the impact that planning interventions have on people and to be able to understand the local dynamics and context (Healey, 2003), data for the study was collected using three different questionnaires: one for each target group to cover a broad spectrum of stakeholders in the tourism milieu of Clarens. The three target groups were:

- Visitors overnighing in Clarens one night or more;
- Day visitors to Clarens; and
- Tourism-related business owners in Clarens.

Prior to administering the questionnaires, a qualitative study was conducted during a fieldtrip to Clarens during which informal interviews were held with various stakeholders in the business sector. Desktop surveys that had previously been carried out on Clarens were also taken into account. Because validity is increased if an established measuring instrument is used, a questionnaire from the database at the Centre for Development Studies (CDS) was adapted to suit the needs of the study. A pilot study was carried out, and the questionnaires were sent out for review by community members of Clarens and academics. The feedback received was incorporated into the questionnaires. Initially, the questionnaires were left to be completed at various locations for a period of three months, but then the time was extended to four months due to the small number of completed questionnaires obtained during the first three months. Questionnaires for visitors staying in guesthouses for one or more nights were distributed to thirty guesthouses in Clarens and the surrounding area. Arrangements were made with the owners or managers to request that guests complete the questionnaires. The reason for this was

that the owners or managers of the guesthouses would know their guests better and would know which people would be willing to complete the questionnaires. Altogether, 372 questionnaires were completed by overnight visitors. Madrid Farm Cottages submitted most (5.4%) of the completed questionnaires, and visitors to the Protea Hotel submitted the second-largest percentage, namely 4.3%.

Because most day visitors visit the square in town for refreshments, questionnaires for day visitors were distributed among seven restaurants on the square in Clarens: 278 on Main, The Highlander, Street Cafe, The Post House, The Artist Cafe, The Grouse & Claret, and The Phatt Chef. The agreement with the owners and managers of these restaurants was that the waiters would receive a fee for each questionnaire fully completed by a day visitor. The waiters approached the customers while they were waiting for their orders to determine whether they were day visitors, and, if so, whether they would mind completing a questionnaire while they were waiting. A total of 103 questionnaires were completed by day visitors. Obtaining an acceptable response rate was a challenge because visitors were reluctant to complete yet another questionnaire on Clarens. Guesthouse owners and managers reported a lack of interest among guests in completing the questionnaires, and owners and managers were cautious not to appear bothersome to paying guests.

According to the listings in the Free State telephone book, internet surveys and a field survey conducted in Clarens, 242 businesses were listed, comprising 120 accommodation enterprises, sixty-three retail and other businesses, including adventure activities, thirty-five restaurants, and twenty-four arts and craft enterprises. A total of sixty-nine local business owners or managers completed the questionnaires for tourism-related businesses.

### 4 Theoretical perspective

Theories can be viewed as the establishment of a discourse, and ideas, such as great places, are examples of such discourses. Many theories are products of their time (Allmendinger, 2009; Friedmann, 2011). The post-positivistic shift of the past three decades comes from over-arching theories on the role of power and discourse in theory development. For relativists, the merits of theories are based on the values and interests of the community that holds them, and in planning relativism embodies postmodern planning (Allmendinger, 2009). John Friedmann (2011) sees post-modernism as the government becoming smaller while the beliefs of the corporate world, accentuating market competition, lead the way. His “good city” or “good society” is about changing situations and societies

**Table 1:** Number of previous visits to Clarens.

Number of previous visits	Overnight visitors, frequency	Percentage	Day visitors, frequency	Percentage
1	93	25.0	21	20.4
2-3	79	21.2	14	13.6
4-5	51	13.7	9	8.7
6-10	24	6.5	10	9.7
More than 10	43	11.6	14	13.6
No response	33	8.9	19	18.4
Total	372	100.0	103	100.0

instead of pursuing profits for politicians and the economically privileged. A normative theory, putting forward how to achieve a world that ought to be, could include communicative or collaborative planning approaches, among others. According to Patsy Healey (2006), Friedmann was a precursor of the communicative planning theory. While collaborative governance spread through the United Kingdom, other partnerships in community development were also unfolding in other parts of the world, including North America. Healey (2006) advocates planning and policymaking based on interactive social processes. Urban planning, after all, is about the city of the future and its impact on people (Hillier & Gunder, 2003). One of the roles of town planners is to determine where particular land use, such as guesthouses or restaurants in this instance, should be located in the future (Todes, 2011). The setting within which planners work has shifted towards an interactive developmental profession (Harrison et al., 2008), although planning with a focus on the quality of places was not a priority (Healey, 2006).

It is important that plans be locally appropriate while also addressing the social context (Todes, 2011). Implementing plans should ideally be a process of negotiation and trade-offs (Healey, 2010). Planning should be an interactive process, hence the terms *collaborative planning* and *communicative planning*, resulting in enhanced qualities of places that are socially inclusive and socially just. Planners should assess the impact that interventions have on people and be able to understand the local dynamics and context (Healey, 2003). Multiplicity is an important quality of urban life and should not be ignored in governance strategies. The attention of governance should be focused on the qualities of place in urban areas, and deliberate attention should be paid to interventions when shaping place qualities (Healey, 2010).

Proper planning should give direction to tourism. This should be done through comprehensive but practical strategic plans. Direction is given through the inclusion of goals and objectives, as well as community participation in compiling local authorities' planning documents. The goals and objectives in-

cluded in planning documents tend not to be broad enough to deal with tourism planning. The goals included in planning documents should be amended in accordance with both general planning objectives and those aimed at tourism. It is important for the success of any tourism destination that the community support the tourism objectives – thus community participation should be included in any planning for future development proposed for or implemented in a region. The value of community inclusion in managing these developments and plans should never be underestimated (Dredge, 2006).

## 5 Findings and discussion

First, the findings of the survey among overnight and day visitors is discussed, followed by the findings obtained from the business sector in Clarens.

### 5.1 Overview of overnight and day visitors

The highest percentage (25%) for the various categories regarding previous visits – namely one, two to three, four to five, six to ten, or more than ten previous visits – among the overnight visitors indicated that they were visiting Clarens for the second time, 21.2% were visiting for a third or fourth time and 11% indicated that they had paid Clarens more than ten visits previously (Table 1). The category “visiting Clarens for the second time” was applicable to the highest percentage (20.4%) among the day visitors, and 13.6% of the day visitors had been to Clarens more than ten times.

The majority of visitors to Clarens were from Gauteng, which is the most densely populated area in the country, where 33.7% of the national population lives (Presidency of the Republic of South Africa, 2012). The highest percentage (12.6%) indicated that they were from Johannesburg, the city with the largest population in the country. Just over 10% of the respondents were international visitors, followed by 8.7% of visitors from neighbouring KwaZulu-Natal. Among the visitors, 37% indicated that they had a tertiary education

**Table 2:** Annual income categories.

Income category	Overnight visitors, frequency	Percentage	Day visitors, frequency	Percentage
Below ZAR 200,000	54	14.5	15	14.6
ZAR 200,001–400,000	68	18.3	19	18.4
ZAR 400,001–700,000	86	23.1	21	20.4
ZAR 700,001–1,000,000	48	12.9	14	13.6
ZAR 1,000,001–1,500,000	32	8.6	5	4.9
Above ZAR 1,500,001	25	6.7	11	10.7
No response	59	15.9	18	17.5
Total	475	100.0	475	100.0

**Table 3:** Activities and amounts spent.

Activity	Overnight visitors, percentage	Amount spent per respondent (ZAR)	Rating	Day visitors, percentage	Amount spent per respondent (ZAR)	Rating
Spent night in Clarens	81.2	2,192	4.5	n. a.	n. a.	n. a.
Fuelled vehicle	44.4	457	3.9	29.1	395	4
Ate at a restaurant	86.6	632	4.2	72	410	4
Went hiking	23.7	135	4.5	8	44	5
White-water rafting	0.3	630	4.1	2	n. r.	n. r.
Bookstore	25.5	270	4	22	200	4
Art	52.2	129	4.3	41	730	5
Quad bikes	8.6	410	4.1	4	n. r.	n. r.
Open vehicle safaris	0.3	n. r.	3	n. r.	n. r.	n. r.
Abseiling	0.3	n. r.	n. r.	n. r.	n. r.	n. r.
Horse riding	8.6	405	4.2	5	330	4
Paintball	0	0	0	0	0	0
Big four-wheel motorbikes	0.8	n. r.	3.5	1	n. r.	n. r.
4x4 routes	4	125	4	2	n. r.	n. r.
Mountain bikes	4.3	40	4.4	0	0	0
Kiddie farm	2.2	80	3.8	0	0	0
Hot-air balloons	0	0	0	0	0	0
Rock art	5.6	n. r.	4.2	3	n. r.	4
Archery	1.1	n. r.	3	0	0	0
Mini Olympics	0.3	0	n. r.	0	0	0
Golf	9.4	1,033	4.3	6	800	3,5
Fly fishing	5.1	370	2	2	n. r.	n. r.
Zipline	1.1	50	3.7	1	n. r.	n. r.
Fossil hunting	1.3	120	3.8	0	0	0
Bicycles	2.4	150	4	1	n. r.	n. r.
Caves	3.5	150	3.5	2	n. r.	4
Yoga classes	0.5	n. r.	n. r.	0	0	0
Spas / treatments	5.6	625	4.2	6	1,700	5
Visit to the township	6.7	225	4.5	5	n. r.	4
Bought art at the former black township	2.4	199	4.5	0	0	0
Visited the former black township	2.4	n. r.	4	2	n. r.	3
Other 1	92.2	1,150	4.3	8	765	5
Other 2	0.8	300	4	1	n. r.	5
Other 3	0.3	200	n. r.	0	0	0

Note: n. r. = no response, n. a. = not applicable

and nearly half (44%) had a graduate degree. The highest percentage among overnight visitors (23.1%) and the day visitors (20.4%) fell within the ZAR 400,000–700,001 annual income brackets, but large percentages (15.9% of overnight visitors and 18.5% of day visitors) did not want to disclose sensitive information such as income (Table 2).

Most of the respondents by far (62.6%) indicated that they had decided to visit Clarens after a friend or relative had told them about this scenic town. A previous visit convinced 8.3%, and passing through the town convinced 6.2% to return to Clarens. The respondents indicated that the main reasons for visiting Clarens as a weekend getaway were holiday and travel (28%) with peace, tranquillity, mountains and scenery listed by 24.5% as their main reason. The most positive aspects of Clarens were listed as nature, mountains, fresh air and scenery by 33.2%, followed by friendly people, hospitality and service (18.6%), and 17.7% indicated that they came to Clarens because it was peaceful and quiet. The majority of respondents (72.9%) indicated that their expectations of Clarens were met. Table 3 shows the various activities, amounts spent and rating (on a five-point scale) for these activities according to overnight visitors and day visitors. The highest amounts spent were on accommodation, and the top-rated activities were hiking, art and spas or health treatments.

## 5.2 Evaluation of the Clarens business environment

Because planning and policymaking have to be based on interactive processes (Healey, 2006) and are about its impact on people (Hillier & Gunder, 2003), the inputs of owners of tourism-related businesses were determined. Out of a possible 242 businesses, sixty-nine business owners/managers completed the business questionnaire. The majority of completed questionnaires were received from the retail and adventure activity sectors, which together represent the second-largest sector in Clarens after accommodation (Table 4). Almost 70% of the respondents were either the director or the owner of the business and the rest were managing it, and therefore the data in this section represent the views of businesspeople in positions of authority in Clarens. Most businesses in Clarens are relatively new because most of the respondents at the time had been in business in Clarens for between one and five years (40.6%), and a minority (14.5%) had been in business there for more than ten years. Table 5 shows the turnover and occupancy rate per month. Occupancy is the highest over the December holidays, followed by the Easter holidays in April. With regard to the turnover amounts per month, for the busiest months the majority of the respondents fell in the ZAR 60,000 to 100,000 bracket, followed by ZAR 100,000

**Table 4:** Businesses surveyed in Clarens.

Type of business	Surveyed	Percentage surveyed
Restaurants	12	17.4
Accommodation	23	33.3
Art & crafts	7	10.1
Retail – other	25	36.2
Adventure activities	1	1.5
Total	68	98.6
No response	1	1.5
Total	69	100

**Table 5:** Turnover and occupancy rate per month.

Month	Occupancy rate / 100	Turnover / 10	Projected turnover
January	46.5	5.7	88,114
February	49.1	4.8	74,202
March	58.2	7.0	108,211
April	60.8	8.1	125,215
May	48.4	5.0	77,293
June	51.6	5.7	88,114
July	53.8	6.6	102,027
August	46.8	5.2	80,385
September	48.2	5.6	86,569
October	49.5	5.9	91,206
November	50.8	6.9	106,665
December	66.1	9.1	140,674

**Table 6:** Turnover amounts for the busiest months.

Amounts	Frequency	Percentage
ZAR 0–50,000	7	10.1
ZAR 60,000–100,000	10	14.5
Above ZAR 100,000	8	11.6
Total	25	36.2
System	44	63.8
Total	69	100

and above, and the minority indicated a turnover of between ZAR 0 and ZAR 50,000 (Table 6).

Employment has risen steadily since 2007, and seventy-seven skilled workers, thirty-seven waiters, 133 cleaners, forty casuals, and eighty-two other workers were employed at the time of the study. The perception among the majority of the respondents (55.1%) was that the market is growing, whereas 31.9% responded that the market is remaining the same. Only a minority of 11.6% experienced the market as declining. The reason indicated for the perception of growth in the market was mainly the increase in the numbers of tourists or customers. Whereas nearly 40% of the businesspeople that responded to the questionnaires planned to expand their businesses, the

majority (60.3%) indicated no intention to expand. These respondents mainly indicated either that they were uninterested in expanding their businesses or that doing so was not financially viable. The only obstacle listed by the minority was that there was no space or adequately zoned space available for expansion. Nearly all of the businesspeople (89.2%) were very positive or positive about the business future of Clarens, and only 1.5% were negative. The motivation behind this response was mainly the growing tourism trade in Clarens and to a lesser extent the beautiful scenery of the area. The Clarens business community viewed the excellent service and products that they delivered and supplied as the most positive aspects of doing business in Clarens.

The majority (33.9%) of Clarens businesspeople were neutral about the possibility of new business developments, either inside or outside of Clarens, 17.5% were against such developments and 15.6% were in favour of new businesses. The vast majority of businesspeople (75%) reported that they did not want to see any national chain stores allowed in Clarens because "Bethlehem is close enough (30 km away) for those tourists that need to shop at these stores," and 18.8% indicated that a few carefully selected chain stores should be allowed. A minor share (5.8%) of the respondents indicated that they would like to see national chain stores allowed. This is a clear indicator that the local community understands the impact a national enterprise may have and that this may be prevented if a proper public participation route is followed.

To allow multinational enterprises in a small tourist town is something that should be considered carefully because it might disturb a small town's ambience. The reason for this is that tourists come to a small town because of its unique attributes and not for multinational enterprises or for a shopping experience. A greater concern, however, is the influence these multinationals tend to have on the economy of a small town because they act like a vacuum cleaner, taking cash out of the local communities' pockets without investing in the rural community. A further concern is that usually such large corporations tend not to care about the local economy and whether it deteriorates because most of them will simply pack up and establish somewhere else if this happens. The need and motivation for local entrepreneurial development is thus of utmost importance.

## 6 Conclusion

The research questions posed were, first, what lessons are to be learned from a flourishing town and, second, whether areas of concern existed that could derail a successful town. In addressing these, the normative theory on how to achieve a world

that ought to be achieved (Friedmann, 2011) is applied. The vast majority of the interviewees experienced Clarens as a "great place" and contributing towards the Clarens success story are location and accessibility, the scenic environment, constant financial capital and the active fine arts community. Friedmann's (2011) good city concept seems to be applicable to Clarens, where profits for politicians and the economically privileged are apparently not pursued.

The following lessons were learned from the Clarens case study about taking advantage of the opportunities present in this small tourist town: geographically, Clarens is located approximately 300 km from South Africa's biggest economic region, Gauteng. The two largest cities in this region, Pretoria and Johannesburg, with the latter only three hours' drive from Clarens, make Gauteng the biggest contributor to tourists visiting Clarens. Clarens also is a three-hour drive from another major city, Durban, although visitors from KZN proved to be only fourth in the figures, probably because of Durban's proximity to local tourist destinations such as the north and south coast and Durban itself. Bloemfontein is also a three-hour drive from the town. The second-largest percentage of visitors to Clarens come from the Free State because Clarens is the closest tourism destination. This provides Clarens with a perfect opportunity to be accessible to three major markets within a short distance, which has contributed significantly to its success. International tourist access is also facilitated by the easy access provided by national routes and two international airports, in Johannesburg and Durban. This is significant due to 10% of tourists visiting Clarens being from outside South Africa.

Other strengths include the natural and unique beauty of Clarens, which is an undeniable part of its success story, and economically Clarens has benefited from the inflow of capital from outside its region. Financially, this strengthens the local economic base because capital generated within Clarens by the community is not only spent in Clarens, but supported and increased by capital that is raised outside the region's borders and then invested in Clarens. Although a number of guesthouse and business owners are from other regions and do not live in the area, the influence of managers and money spent on investments and overseeing these enterprises cannot be overlooked. The importance of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project must also be taken into account in Clarens's success story. It has provided more than simply additional infrastructure: it has also helped promote the area to international guests. The character of the town has also become more tourist-friendly in the sense that it has started to cater to the needs of people not originally from the town. This has created a tolerance of other languages and cultures, and has promoted the area as an attractive area for investment. This may not have been one of the key factors at the beginning of the town's development,

when it was still relatively unknown, but it is relevant in order to understand the ongoing success of Clarens.

In the interview mentioned earlier, Van Biljon (2014) also said that “the occupancy rate peaks during April and December; it must be noted that every weekend and during school holidays Clarens attracts visitors and there is no peak or off-peak season in Clarens.” This continuous economic and social influx has created a stable economic base and financial environment in which businesses can flourish. Artists that moved to Clarens to establish workshops and galleries introduced a foundation for tourism to start from. Quality art is sold at reasonable prices. The variety of artists and galleries found in the town also creates a wider variety available to tourists and provides them with an additional reason to visit the area.

Risks exist, such as a lack of cooperation among all parties – namely, planners or decision-makers and local residents (Cerara, 2014; Bratina Jurkovič, 2014). The ideal would be for the main role-players to be part of all planning policies (Donaldson et al., 2014). Some respondents stated that products were becoming more expensive and that Clarens was losing its rural feel due to overcrowding during weekends, and they cited the threat of multinational enterprises opening in Clarens. Although this might seem like a good thing from a business perspective, it might prove more of a frustration for those visiting the town for a relaxed quiet weekend.

Tourism has become a competitive industry, and learning how to cater properly to tourists is becoming increasingly important, as can be inferred from the findings of this study. In order to address the risks mentioned above, Clarens needs to become more competitive in the national market, but it also needs to position itself better for its own market. The hypothesis of the study – namely, that, by understanding why a tourist town such as Clarens succeeds whereas other towns falter and fail, town and regional planners can improve the outcomes of small-town development – thus can be confirmed.

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## Notes

[1] EUR 1 = ZAR 16.38 (as of April 2016).

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