# Growing like a Magic Mushroom:

# AfrikaBurn Festival in the Tankwa Karoo

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## Abstract

AfrikaBurn is a South African version of the Burning Man festival, held annually at Black Rock, Nevada, USA.  AfrikaBurn is a participatory explosion of creativity, art, and innovation, which arises for a week on a remote desert floor in the Tankwa Karoo.  The central focus is a set of wooden sculptures, which are burnt in a celebration of destruction and rebirth. This paper provides the findings of an on-site survey of 188 participants, in terms of the demographic characteristics, as well as their views about the AfrikaBurn festival. The interviewees were predominantly middle-class professionals, white people, and involved in a variety of creative careers. There was a strong international contingent from Europe and the USA. The survey also explored their ideological and normative views, and compared them to the official AfrikaBurn values. The study found that most participants were committed to values such as creativity, generosity, community, communal effort, and self-reliance. These post-modern values are also strongly felt at Burning Man in the USA, suggesting that the urban middle class in South Africa may share a great deal of values and priorities with urban middle class people in the United States.
**Keywords**

Tankwa, Karoo, AfrikaBurn, Burning Man, desert, creativity, pyrotechnics, festivals, South Africa



**AfrikaBurn art installation:** *Subterrafuge*  (Photo: Adri Smit)

**Introduction**

AfrikaBurn is a South African version of the Burning Man festival at Black Rock, Nevada, USA.  AfrikaBurn describes itself as "the spectacular result of the creative expression of participants who gather once a year in the Tankwa Karoo to create a temporary city of art, theme camps, costume, music and performance" (AfrikaBurn 2015).

Burning Man has taken place every year since 1986 – first on a beach in San Francisco, and since 1990, in a remote desert location, Black Rock, in Nevada. The growth of the event has been spectacular, unanticipated and unprecedented, with "attendance numbers surging exponentially every year and its fame now a global phenomenon".  At the 2015 Burning Man, attendance reached 66 000 participants (Burning Man 2015), for a week-long event. It has, however, remained controversial; the number of passionate supporters has grown, as has the number of detractors. Many people are critical of the degree of hedonism and partying, but other people are convinced that Burning Man is a life-changing, positive experience.

Like its Burning Man counterpart, AfrikaBurn is a lavish spectacle and participatory explosion of creativity, art, and ingenuity, which arises for a week on a remote desert floor in the Tankwa Karoo.  It then disappears, leaving no trace – an alternative civilisation which has been termed an "ephemeropolis" (Gilmore 2005: 1). The central focus is a set of wooden sculptures, often with "humanoid" characteristics, which are burnt in a celebration of destruction and rebirth.  Tickets are sold, and are compulsory for admission; these fees cover basic infrastructure such as toilets, a few "public buildings", and disaster management. Participants typically spend significant sums of money, not only on the tickets, but also on transport, bringing their camping gear, food and water.  There is no corporate sponsorship, given the organisers' desire to distance the event from the "commodity economy". AfrikaBurn, like Burning Man, is a cornucopia of subcultures seeking different experiences, "a subculturally diverse congeries of campers, anarchists, ravers, digerati, artists, spiritual seekers, tourists, urban planners, [and] visionaries" (Sherry and Kozinets 2007: 121).

Burning Man has aroused a great deal of scholarly interest, as the event appears to flag new directions in modern and post-modern popular culture.  Numerous peer-reviewed academic papers, as well as several PhD theses, have been completed about various aspects of the Burning Man experience – its rituals and spirituality (Gilmore 2005); its performance art (Ramey 2014); and its impacts on the world outside the festival (Swan 2006); the organisational dynamics of the event (Chen 2004); and the psychological impacts of the immersion experience at Burning Man (Hockett 2004).  In our study of AfrikaBurn, we have benefited from a wide range of academic and popular literature on Burning Man, in order to contextualise such a radical festival of creativity within modern society.  Much of this literature focuses on the cultural significance and normative dimensions of the event. Burning Man has been described as a countercultural "transformational festival" (Bottorff 2015).  Bottorff interprets this as a particular instance of "transmodernism", which is a reaction against both the rationalist values of modernism as well as the potentially nihilistic and relativist values of postmodernism. Many contemporary people seek some return to important values, such as "morality, ethics, beauty and spirit" (Bottorff 2015:54), without lapsing into conventional inherited doctrines. Many participants are acutely aware that they have to figure out such normative answers for themselves; they are therefore willing and eager to expose themselves to new and challenging experiences.  Burning Man, as a "transformational festival", shares certain characteristics with other deeply participatory events: A social or gift economy, workshops, interactive art, remote outdoor location, ceremonies and rituals, sacred spaces, music, tribal dance, and participant co-creation with experiential learning (Bottorff 2015: 54).

These events typically combine an ethos of communal responsibility with a wide scope for individual freedom and self-exploration, in a non-judgemental environment.  These communities function as "temporary autonomous zones", variously defined as an area or period "fully removed from the taint of the ordinary, commodified and regulated" life (Gilmore 2005: 16), or "short-term anarchic yet intentional communities that encourage personal expression and radical acceptance" (Bottorff 2015: 56).  Clearly, Burning Man is not simply a hedonistic indulgence, although a great deal of fun and pleasure is to be had.

**AfrikaBurn: A spectacle in the desert**

AfrikaBurn is a deliberate echo of Burning Man (Nevada) – both are events with at least four major common characteristics: Firstly, a remote and harsh desert location; secondly, an artistic climax involving setting fire to gigantic artworks; thirdly, a strong focus on decommodification and generosity; and fourthly, no celebrity or mainstream musicians hired to perform – the participants are required to immerse themselves in the experience and create their own artwork. In both venues, the only transport that is allowed is by bicycle or "mutant vehicle", creating physical spaces that are fun and safe for pedestrians.

This study is the first academic research project on AfrikaBurn - the South African version of Burning Man. AfrikaBurn has taken place annually since 2007, on a remote farm in the Tankwa Karoo – between Ceres in the south and Calvinia in the North.
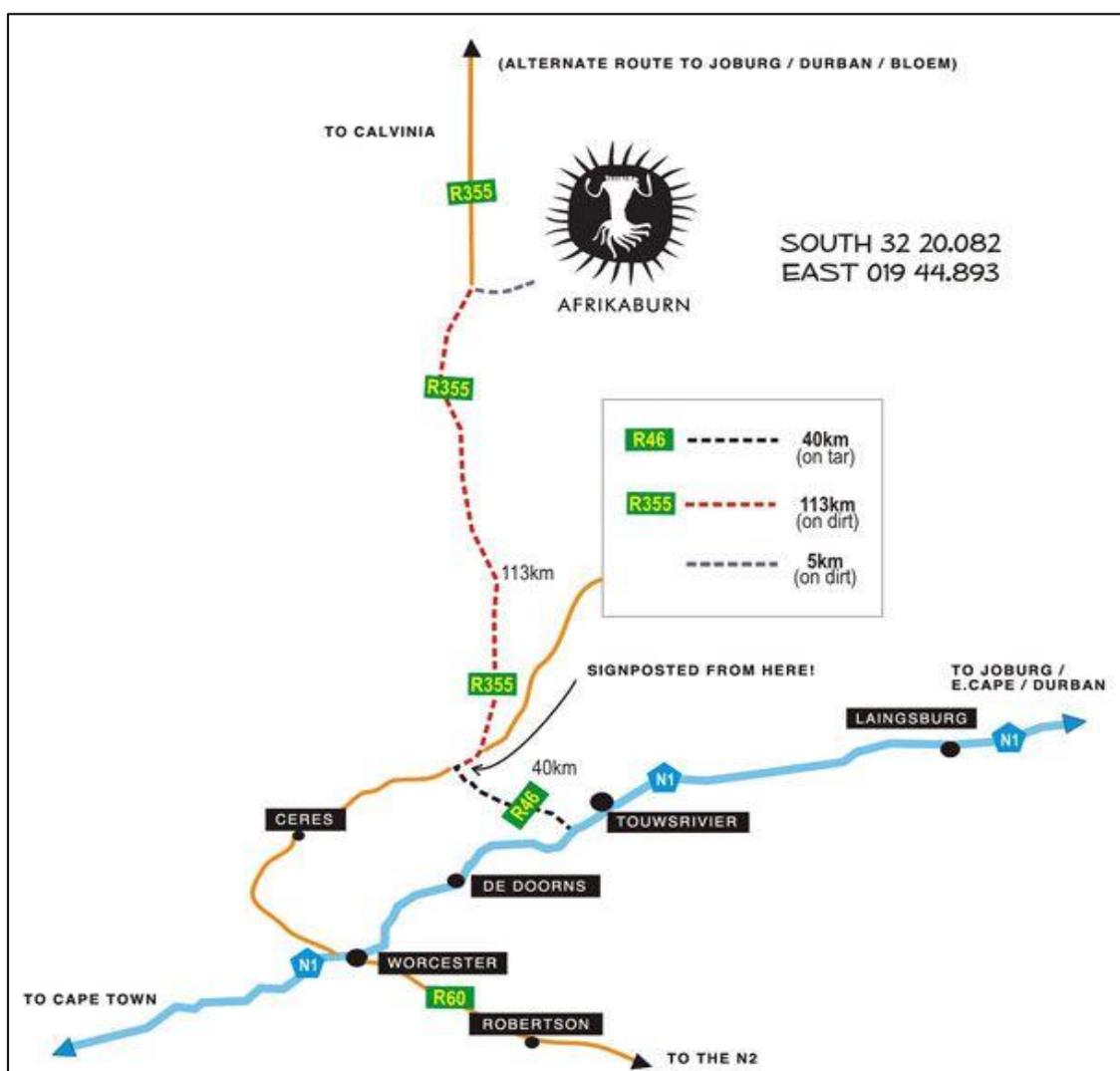


Source: AfrikaBurn (2015)

The event is managed by a non-profit company called Afrika Burns Creative Projects.  Each annual event has an evocative theme, which acts as a creative fulcrum for the wide range of artistic efforts (AfrikaBurn 2015):

**Table 1: Themes and participation in AfrikaBurn, 2007-2015**

| Year | Theme | Number of participants |
|---|---|---|
| 2007 | Tribe | 1 000 |
| 2008 | Power | 1200 |
| 2009 | Time | 1600 |
| 2010 | Dream | 2200 |
| 2011 | "Stof"/Dust: The primal mud | 4000 |
| 2012 | Mirage | 5700 |
| 2013 | Archetypes | 7000 |
| 2014 | The Trickster | 9000 |
| 2015 | The Gift | 9800 |

Both Burning Man and AfrikaBurn consciously espouse key normative principles (they share 10 principles, while AfrikaBurn has added an 11th principle).  The paper focuses primarily on the values of the AfrikaBurn participants. What does the festival mean for them? At its heart is a basic question:  Is AfrikaBurn simply an exercise in hedonistic pleasure-seeking and survivalist bravado, or does it have a more important significance for early 21st Century South African society?





**Metamorphosis ablaze**

**Photo: Adri Smit**

**Art installation: Metamorphosis**

**Photo: Richard Atkinson**

## Methodology of the study

A questionnaire for AfrikaBurn participants was compiled in discussions with the AfrikaBurn organisers. They helped to frame the questions in ways which would be appealing and interesting to participants. On almost all questions, open-ended responses were permitted. The questionnaire focused on the values of the participants, and did not raise issues such as the financial outlays, financial impacts or organisational dynamics of the event.

A team of five researchers joined the AfrikaBurn "tribe" in April 2015, setting up camp just before the event opened, and remaining on-site for five days. The research project consisted of interviews conducted face-to-face with 188 participants. The team handed out car stickers (*"I bared it all at Afrikaburn")* as gifts to respondents and Burners.



**Research tent:**
*I Bared It All At AfrikaBurn*
**Photo: Richard Atkinson**



**Research team dressed for action**
**Photo: Richard Atkinson**

The interviews were conducted in the first few days of the event; this period tended to attract the Burners who intended to stay the whole week, in contrast to the "weekend warriors" who arrived later. The early arrivals were often eager to examine their own feelings about the event. By mid-week, the atmosphere of the event had become more exuberant, and participants – who seemed to be more of a "party animal" variety - were increasingly reluctant to spend time responding to interview questions.  It is likely that the week-long Burners were of a more ideologically committed type than the more fun-loving participants who arrived later during the week. The shift in atmosphere between the early and later arrivals is somewhat similar to that experienced by one observer in Burning Man in Nevada: "Before the festival opens, crews work together building camps and art. They help one another out, feed one another, care for one another. Then the public arrives and the energy

begins to corrupt. By week's end the "playa" [the site of the event] is taken over by seekers wanting drugs, wanting sex, wanting - they don't know what they want, they only know the wanting, and it is a powerful force, all that unchanneled desire, all those people confusing it with sex, scratching at it as at an unhealed wound, all that choosing of the apple over paradise" (Fenton 2012).

During our research process, our interviewers roamed the camp ground.  The interviewers entered into the spirit of the event, dressing up in exotic garb, getting involved in local events, and sharing gifts.  They identified possible interviewees at random.  In some cases, several people were found in one campsite, and they all responded to the questionnaires, often sitting around amicably chatting to the interviewers. In some cases, interviewees wanted to fill the questionnaire out by themselves. Because the researchers did not want to impede the festival atmosphere, they were flexible about allowing people to fill in the forms themselves, if they preferred that approach.  The researchers did their best to remain unobtrusive within the festival environment.

In 2015, just under 9 800 people attended AfrikaBurn.  A total of 188 Burners were interviewed, giving a sample size of just under 2%. This relatively small sample is, nevertheless, useful, as it helped to clarify future avenues of inquiry, and also provided valuable practical experience regarding the survey style and logistics in a very unusual environment.

## Race, gender, home language and place of origin

Of the 188 burners, 101 were men and 87 were women. The racial profile was as followed: 176 whites, 4 Asians, 2 "coloureds and 2 blacks.  The question of white predominance at AfrikaBurn is related to the same phenomenon at Burning Man. At both festivals, few black people participate, despite their principle of "radical inclusion".  A variety of reasons have been offered for the low participation rate by black people. One is that black people generally don't like camping - an explanation offered by the founder of Burning Man, Larry Harvey, an effervescent character who was married to a Jamaican woman and has mixed-race children (Hiller 2015). Other reasons are that Black people they fear racism in a largely white event; or that they find the hedonism uncomfortable (Thrasher 2015); or that the "word of mouth" approach to information dissemination may systematically exclude black social networks, and so they simply don't know about the event (Hiller 2015).

Other hypotheses have been suggested: That Burning Man requires a sense of security (comfortableness with extreme behaviour such as nakedness or alternative art) which black people typically do not share; the sexual mores of minority cultures tend to me more conservative than those of people who like Burning Man;  potential black participants would encounter hostility from their friends and family;  and – intriguingly – that black people have a fundamentally different history regarding social resistance. Whereas white people experienced hippy-dom and flower power in the 1960s, black people were busy achieving political and civil rights.

Many black people aspire to acceptance in mainstream society, not to rebel against it (Caveat Magister 2012). Burning Man can be regarded as attractive to those whose "culture" is the norm, or "default", and who also "find themselves to be on various levels in opposition to that norm and its perceived deficiencies" (Gilmore 2005); presumably, because many black people belong to a variety of ethnic subcultures, they may not have such a need to break with the mainstream.

The level of white preponderance in the event has given rise to some self-reflection amongst black people who *do* participate (Thrasher 2015).  Many black people have found that the burden of generalised prejudice is lifted at Burning Man; they experience a rare degree of social acceptance.

Interviewees were asked about their home language; since some spoke more than one home language, the responses (209) were larger than the number of interviewees (188).  English was spoken by 64% of the respondents, Afrikaans by 16%, European languages by 15%, and Asian and Middle Eastern languages by 4%.  African indigenous languages were only spoken by two interviewees (1% of the sample). This suggests that the appeal and "reach" of the event is much greater internationally (amongst non-South Africans) than amongst South African black people.  The language profile at AfrikaBurn is remarkably similar to that of Burning Man.  In each case, about 81% of participants speak the home languages of the country (Black Rock City Census 2015).

The country of origin of the AfrikaBurn participants (177 respondents provided information) are overwhelmingly South African (81%).  Eight 8% came from Europe. A smattering of people came from North America (3%), Middle East (3%), the UK (3%), Australia, New Zealand and Africa north of the Limpopo.

When comparing the international profile of the two events, they are remarkably similar.  About 19% of AfrikaBurn interviewees came from countries outside South Africa, while 20% of interviewees in Burning Man came from outside the USA.  However, Burning Man is substantially supported by its neighbouring country, Canada (5% of the sample), while in South Africa, only 1% of interviewees came from neighbouring states.  A remarkable total of 18% of AfrikaBurn interviewees came from "long-haul" or inter-continental destinations.

Of the 114 South Africans, the majority came from the Western Cape (56%), but also with strong representation from Gauteng (20%) and KwaZulu-Natal (11%).  A few people live in the Eastern Cape (4%), Free State (4%), North West (3%), Mpumalanga (1%) and the Northern Cape (1%).  This festival can now be described as a national festival, at least as far as its footprint is concerned.  The preponderance of the metro-based provinces is notable; it suggests that AfrikaBurn appeals primarily to city folk.

In both AfrikaBurn and Burning Man, the event is held in a province (or state) different from its main "home base" of organisers and supporters. AfrikaBurn is held in the remote and arid Northern Cape Province, while Burning Man is held in the remote desert state of Nevada.  AfrikaBurn's "home base" is Cape Town, while Burning Man's base is in San Francisco. In each case, we can assess the extent of dominance of the home base, in terms of interviewee numbers. In AfrikaBurn, 56% of the interviewees hailed from the Western Cape, while 41% of interviewees in Burning Man came from California (BRCC 2015). This suggests that Burning Man has a more diverse regional footprint than AfrikaBurn.

## Professional profile

In terms of work status, 43% of the interviewees at AfrikaBurn were in full-time jobs, while another 37% were self-employed.  Students made up 11% of the group, while young people on a gap year comprised 2% and 1% were volunteers. About 5% were unemployed and 1% were pensioners.

**Figure 1: Professional profile of survey participants**
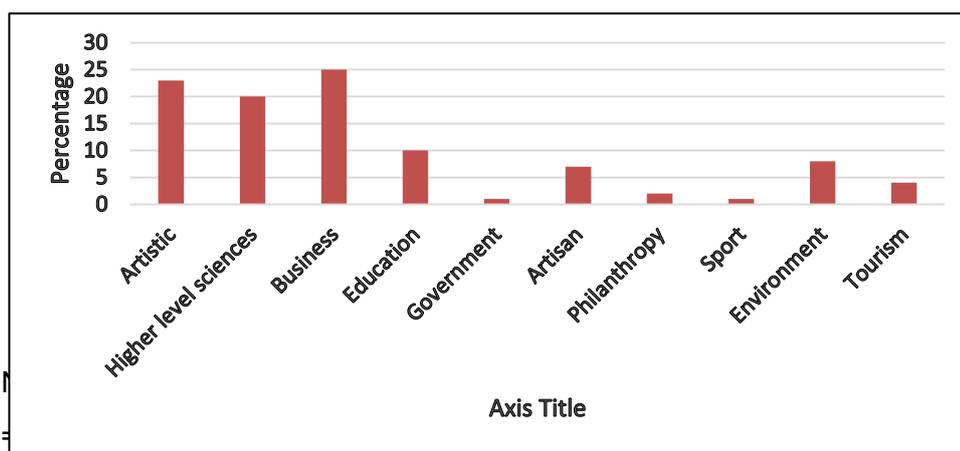


Their jobs were overwhelmingly "middle-class". Almost 25% were involved in business; 23% were in the creative arts; 20% were in higher-level scientific occupations; 10% were involved in teaching, lecturing and journalism; and 8% were active in environmentally related professions, such as agriculture, property, horticulture, water management, botany landscaping, and wine-making. Just under 4% of people were active in the tourism sector. Seven percent were involved in artisan-type professions, including plumbing, cleaning, technicians, construction, automotive, printing, and a "Jack of all trades".

**Age and educational profile**

The participants showed a very varied age profile. The predominant group (93%) are working-age people, with 28% in their twenties, 31% in their thirties, 20% in their forties, and 14% in their fifties. There were a few teenagers (only 3%) and a few over-sixties (about 4%). This profile is similar to that of Black Rock City, where "Age groups were all adequately represented;  the biggest age group was 25 – 29 year olds, followed by 30 – 34 years olds" (BRCC 2015).

**Figure 2: Age groups in Burning Man (2015) and AfrikaBurn (2015)**
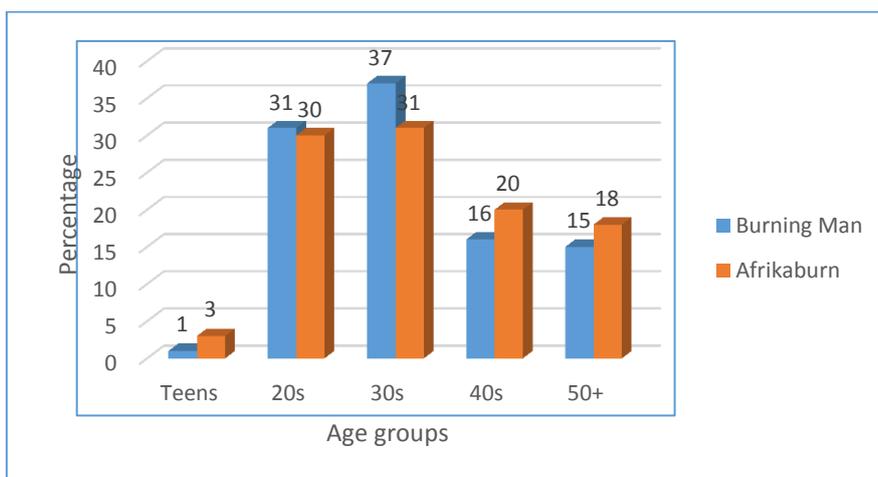


AfrikaBurn: n=183; Burning Man: n=2270.

This suggests that the event appeals to a wide range of tastes, and is particularly important for professional and working people.

The 24-34 age group is particularly significant.   These post-Baby Boomers, in early adulthood, are typically in a phase when people experience a major psychosocial transition (Bottorff 2015: 57).   This demographic group, which was born at the beginning of the Information age, is generally identified with "technological competency, resourcefulness, diligence, tolerance for alternative lifestyles, ambitiousness, studiousness, eagerness for work–life balance, independence, and ability to multitask";  but it is also often regarded as "cynical, superficial, defiant, selfish, skeptical, aloof, resistant to hierarchy, and individualistic" (Bottorff 2015: 57). Given these values, often in tension with one another, it is probably not surprising that these young adults value a tolerant and creative space where they can explore their own rather contradictory values and strip off their conventional facades.

The AfrikaBurn sample was extraordinarily well educated. Almost all participants (184 out of 188) had post-matric qualifications: 52% have a first degree, 32% had a diploma, and 17% had post-graduate qualifications (Honours, Masters and PhD).  These findings are similar to those of Burning Man participants in 2014, where 43% had a basic degree and 27% had postgraduate qualifications (Heller et al 2014).

The sample is also very well-travelled and cosmopolitan, with 96% having travelled abroad. More than half (57%) had lived abroad.

**Social preferences and hobbies**

In addition to these demographic factors, interviewees were asked about their hobbies and interests?  Multiple answers were allowed. About 36% of the sample can be categorised as "creative".  The most frequent responses (22%) included creative arts: Music, drumming, film, theatre, photography, drama, and dance.  More fringe interests included calligraphy, beach sculptures, Anime, and tattooing. Other creative activities involved intellectual games (10%): Chess, reading, poker, magic, riddles, and history.  An interest in cuisine and wine amounted to an additional 4% of the sample.  The broad category of "adventure" comprises 25% of the sample.  These include outdoor sports, which comprised 18% of the sample: Hiking, mountain biking, fishing, horse-riding, surfing, and birding.  An additional 7% are interested in travel, and 2% in cars and bikes.  A broad category of spiritual interests comprises about 8% of the sample.  This alternative faiths and doctrines such as Fengshui, Buddhism, yoga, and meditation.  Some fringe interests included health and healing, :medical marijuana", esoteric studies, alchemy, and – interesting for AfrikaBurn – pyrotechnics.

About 11% of people practiced sport, and another 10% of the sample was interested in practical hobbies such as gardening, sewing, architecture, and pottery.

There is a group of people who like to party (6%), and finally, there are those (2%) who engage with social ideals and activities, such as volunteering, current affairs and business. It is possible that the latter category is understated, due to the atmosphere of fun and leisure at AfrikaBurn. In future, a deeper investigation may be required into people's altruistic social commitments and activities.  It is possible that a more specific question on volunteering and altruistic activities amongst AfrikaBurn participants may yield a much higher figure than is reflected here.

**First-time and returning Burners**

Just more than half (52%) of the interviewees were experiencing their first Burn.  This is much larger than the case of Nevada Black Rock City Burning Man, where 41% were "Burner Virgins" (newcomers) in 2014 (Black Rock Census 2014). This suggests that the growth rate of AfrikaBurn is rapid, attracting a large number of new participants every year.

**Figure 3: "Virgin" and repeat participants at AfrikaBurn (2015) and Burning Man (2014)**
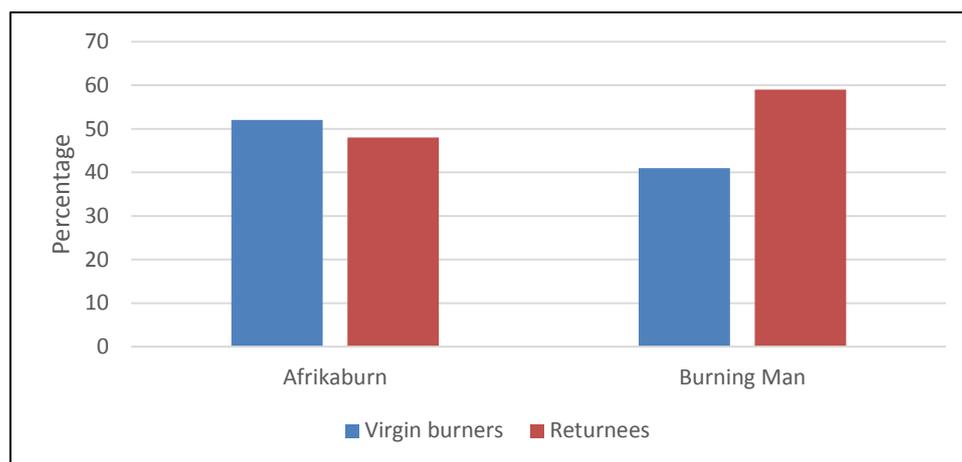


AfrikaBurn: n=188; Burning Man n=2566

In the AfrikaBurn sample, there was a "return rate" of 48%. However, the fact that the interviews were conducted within the first five days of the event may overstate the total number of "returnees", since many of them came to set up theme tents and art works. It is likely that, at the end of the Burn week, the balance may shift even further to Virgin Burners.



**Theme tent: *Boerassic Park* (idiosyncratically South African)**

**Photo: Richard Atkinson**

Burners were asked how they had heard of the event (a few people offered more than one response).  By far the largest number of responses (160, or 82%) had heard via "word of mouth", from friends or family. The event is not growing due to public relations campaigns (in fact, AfrikaBurn does not advertise at all), but because people experience the Burn and talk about it afterwards – suggesting that it is a life-changing experience.  Eighteen people (9%) had obtained information from the internet or social media.  A surprisingly large number had heard of Burning Man in the USA or in other parts of the world, or had experienced such events (14 people, or 7% of responses). Only three people mentioned that they had read about it in the printed media.

The vast majority of Burners (96%) had arrived as part of a group.  Only nine individuals, or 4% of the sample, had arrived on their own:

**Figure 4: Individuals and groups visiting AfrikaBurn**
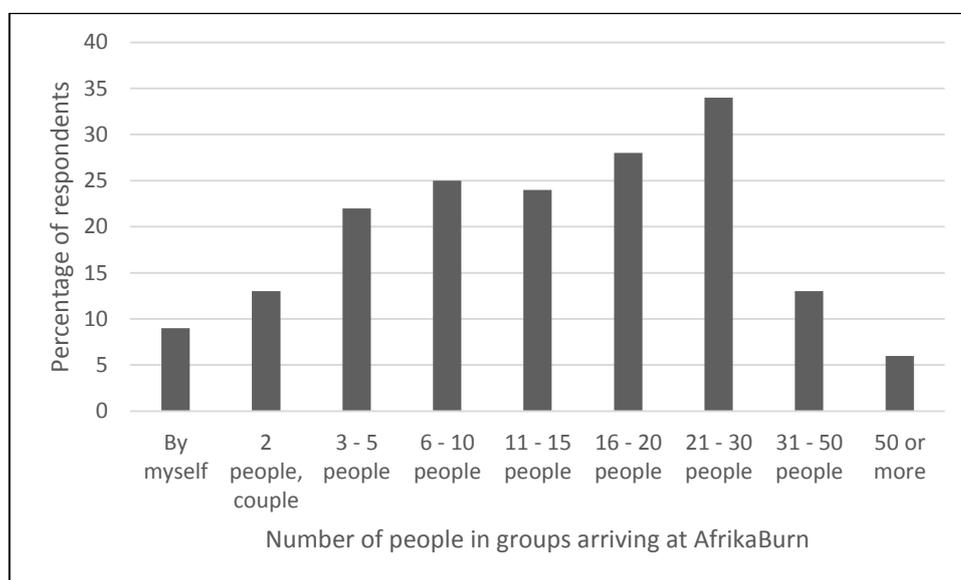


N=174

The groups were often surprisingly large, and over 31% of respondents indicated that their groups consisted of more than 20 people.

**First-time and returning burners**

Of the 97 participants who were attending for the first time, a very large proportion (90%) said that they would like to come again; only three people said that they would definitely not come again.

Of the 91 interviewees who had attended AfrikaBurn before, the largest number (45) had attended one or two Burns in the past. A surprisingly large number (30) had attend between three and five Burns, and 13 had attended between six or more Burns.  This demonstrates a strong "loyalty factor" amongst Burners.
**Why Burner Virgins and Returnees want to return to the Burn**

Respondents were asked about reasons why they might want to come back to the Burn (for first-time Burners) or why they had decided to return (for Returnees). The three strongest concerns for newcomers were (a) having an extraordinary experience, (b) the social interaction, and (c) having fun.  For Returnees, the first two priorities were similar, but Freedom and Creativity were also notable features.  First-timers were also driven by curiosity, whereas returnees had a stronger focus on the desert environment and making a contribution.

**Figure 6: Perspectives on returning to the Burn**
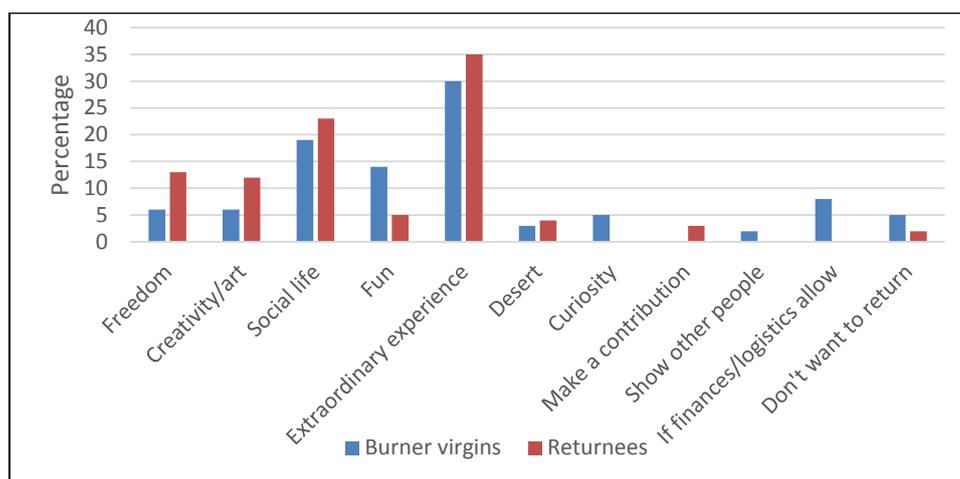


N=184

A general impression is that the Returnees have more focus on the "higher" values of the event, and appreciation of the environment, whereas the First Timers had a stronger focus on fun and curiosity. Interestingly, two Returnees mentioned "social pressure" in their decision to return.  For three First Timers, it would be a one-off experience, not really to be repeated. The most significant factor motivating first-time Burners was the extraordinary quality of the event, expressed in various terms: "Meaningful" or even "spiritual", with comments such as "love it", "it challenges one", "re-energizing", "opens my spirits", "I feel truly myself", "it makes me feel alive", "the most awesome experience of my life", "it's like coming home", "teaches me life lessons", "enriches my soul", and "it's a new journey". Similarly, for Returnees, the largest group of responses referred to the profound meaning of the event for them personally:

The event is "awesome", "a great event, unique experience", "highlight of the year", "a life changing experience", "I am addicted to AB", and "It helps me to improve myself". For both groups, the second-largest group of responses was the social life at the event, with comments such as: "community", warmth and kindness, "people are friends", "I like the culture", "I like the gifting", "it is like a family reunion", and "I spend quality time with my friends".  A large groups of Returnees also emphasised the social cohesion and community-spiritedness of the event: Gifting, "meeting cool people", "I love the people", "I experience a sense of synchronicity", and people enjoy the open interaction with other Burners.  Several people mentioned the contribution that they themselves like to make to the event.   In fact, the layout of the AfrikaBurn site – similar to Burning Man – is intentionally designed to generate a certain quality of community and civic space (Gilmore 2005: 210) – a roughly circular design, with an open centre (called the "Playa" at AfrikaBurn).

**"Mutant vehicles" offer opportunities for playful social interaction**

**Photo: Richard Atkinson**

Some of the Returnees offered important additional responses, since they have already been exposed to the culture of AfrikaBurn. One significant factor was the sense of freedom (13%) and artistic creativity (12%).  A few people (4%) mentioned the desert environment and their enjoyment of the physical desolation. In fact, deserts have often evoked images as *loci* of transformation, being simultaneously surreal and offering limitless possibility, a blank slate on which new personal experiences can be painted (Gilmore 2005: 195).

Interestingly, two people mentioned social pressure to keep coming to the event, suggesting that they would prefer not to return, but that they felt dragooned by their peer group.

**How do Burners experience subsequent Burns?**

Returnees were asked how their later events compare with their first visit, with the benefit of hindsight. The most common response (26%) is that the event *improves* with later visits; "it gets more magical", as one person put it. Perhaps the first event is a bit of a shock, and participants come more prepared during later visits. However, 9 people (about 9%) maintained that the *first time was the best.*

About 16% of respondents felt that they were more *involved* in the Burner community during later visits: They were more busy and likely to participate in various activities. Fourteen people felt that they were more *self-reliant* on later visits: People are better prepared, it is less overwhelming, people are more realistic, the experience is easier, and they are more comfortable.  At least ten people felt that the event was *better organised.*  Six people felt that each event is radically *different*, so it is difficult to compare.

Then there were a set of minor responses which may have broader significance. About four people felt that the *kind of participants* is changing; one person felt it was becoming more commercial; two respondents felt that drugs were more prevalent, one person felt that theft was becoming more prevalent, and two felt that the later visitors were less environmentally aware. Only four people felt that the event remained basically the same every year.

**The AfrikaBurn experience as part of a personal journey**

Various concepts of journeys and pilgrimages have long been associated with Burning Man in Nevada, at least partly because the remote desert location requires a significant amount of arduous travel to get there (Gilmore 2005: 193).  The link between the physical journey and possible personal journeys of transformation remains enigmatic but suggestive.

AfrikaBurn respondents were asked how they understood their AfrikaBurn experiences within the context of their life trajectory.

In a total of 250 open-ended responses, *"personal growth"* featured the most frequently (68 responses or 28%).  Within this category of responses, the following specific elements were mentioned:  Inspirational, awesome, a sense of motivation, a personal journey, personal beliefs, experiencing another dimension, an epic experience, karma, values, discovering myself, a climax experience, a catharsis, pushing boundaries, finding out what is important for ourselves, changing my life, exploration, pilgrimage, spiritual  regeneration, it changed my outlook, a sense awareness, losing your mind, an important experience on my bucket list, soul food, self-reliance, and mind-blowing.  In a spirit of rather radical honesty, some Burners referred to their goal of losing their virginity, or having sex.   The variety of spiritual experiences mentioned in the interviews echoes  the spiritual diversity which has been discovered amongst Burning Man participants – including regular Christian church-goers, people subscribing to alternative religions, and people who are secular or atheistic (Gilmore 2005: 55). Some themes in our AfrikaBurn survey responses are related to journeys, pushing boundaries and pilgrimages – what has been described as "a spirituality of seeking" (Gilmore 2005: 67).  In a survey of Burning Man participants, 74% of respondents replied affirmatively to the question: "Has Burning Man been a life- or perspective-changing experience for you?" (Gilmore 2005: 201).  These transformative aspirations at Burning Man have been described as "Spirituality without religion" (Gilmore 2005:1).  This is a powerful psychological force: "Many people leave Burning Man transformed … They start new relationships or end old ones, switch careers, decide to move or redesign their lives in other dramatic ways. Few people leave unchanged" (Bowditch 2013: 21).

The key mechanism is the burning of the large wooden Burning Man effigy itself, which enacts metaphor of the phoenix - burning the old and being reborn. Lee Gilmore (2005:20) has analysed this transformative experience, through ritual, as sharing qualities with other spiritual events:  Typically, there is a separation from the mundane world into a "liminal" realm, somewhere between the realms of the sacred and profane; and finally, a return to the secular world having gained new meaningful experiences.



**Art and fire: A powerful mix**

**Photo: Richard Atkinson**

**Photo: Adri Smit**

The second-most important theme at AfrikaBurn (20%) was that of *freedom*, articulated in various ways: Self-expression, release, escape, be who I want, not care what people think, letting go, finding another world, breaking away. The significance of personal transformation, in our sample, echoes the findings of a survey conducted at Burning Man in Nevada, where participants were less likely to engage in "expressive suppression" than they do at home (i.e. they were less likely to inhibit the outward display of emotions), and were more likely to engage in "cognitive reappraisal", which involves the use of thought to change subsequent emotions (McRae et al 2011).

Close on the heels of this theme is that of *community life* (19%), with terms such as: Awesome people, unity with others, kindred spirits, "joining the tribe", openness, and sharing. In the case of a somewhat similar study at Burning Man, 82% of the respondents made some mention of *community* as an important aspect of their experience (Gilmore 2005: 203). In our study, the focus on "community" meant a wide range of factors; again, this is similar to the study of Burning Man, where the focus on "community" included a variety of dimensions, such as the entire "burner community", or a broadened perspective on humanity, or a group of friends and like-minded people found at the site, or emotional qualities of fellowship, affinity and unity (Gilmore 2005:204). The common theme is that participants seemed to overrule their sense of isolation, and connected with other participants at some deeper level.



**Community service:**

**The Grease Monkeys fixing bicycles for Burners**

**Photo: Adri Smit**

A sense of *novelty* was also important (5%): People came because of a sense of curiosity, a desire to be part of a unique experience, "seeing for myself", being exposed to new things and experiences, wanting to witness an amazing concept "which I just had to see".

*Having fun* was also important (9%).  Similarly, in Burning Man, many people regard the event as "a grand party, an excuse for debauchery and a license for transgressive behaviour", which – on the face of it – do not seem to have much connection with spiritual growth. However, as Gilmore (2005: 212) noted, fun, playfulness, display and carnivals have often been associated with Christian festivals and pilgrimages – at a certain point, the experience of losing oneself in delight and pleasure contributes to the overall richness of the event.  Were it not for people having fun at AfrikaBurn, it may well have dampened the experience for people who saw it in more lofty spiritual terms.



**Creative burners**

**Photo: Richard Atkinson**

The *desert environment* received surprisingly few mentions (2%).  "Helping others", in the form of gifting or volunteering was only mentioned by one person.  Several people had experienced Burning Man in the US, and were eager to try it out in the African setting.

*Creativity* was mentioned occasionally (7% of responses), referring to art, music, creativity, dressing up, and "developing the right side of my brain".  This is a rather small percentage, given the importance of art in the *raison d'etre* of AfrikaBurn. In the case of Burning Man, for example, "Black Rock is a civilisation where art is absolutely central to everyday life" (Dyer 2006: 34). Perhaps AfrikaBurn does not have quite as strong an artistic impulse as Burning Man.

Even though few interviewees at AfrikaBurn mentioned "helping" as a core part of their experience, a significant number (44%) had brought gifts for others. A total of 81 respondents (36%) had brought a theme tent, and 34 people (15%) had brought artwork. Many people had brought art, gifts as well as theme tents (the questionnaire allowed for multiple responses). Clearly, there were more people who were actively "creative" than the number who mentioned it as a key value in their personal journey. It may well be that some people brought gifts or theme tents which were brought primarily as a gesture of generosity to fellow Burners.  Only 11 people (about 5% of the total) had brought nothing. The importance of bringing something to share – whether art, food or performance – often requires weeks of preparation, which heightens participants' sense of commitment and self-reliance (Feldman 2013: 20).  The desert environment tends to promote a culture of sharing:

"With resources scarce in the desert, intense sharing is the most efficient practice, suggesting that humans may yet realize a sustainable evolutionary trajectory", according to a group of evolutionary biologists who attended Burning Man in Nevada (Hodin et al 2009).

Curiously, only one person responded with "See the Burn" as his/her motivation for coming to the event. The fact that the survey was held a few days *before* the actual burning events may have had an impact on the findings. At Burning Man, the experience of large structures going up in flames has elicited a great deal of commentary, due to the mystique, danger and symbolism of fire (Bowditch 2013). The following table compares AfrikaBurn to Burning Man:

**Figure 7:  Reasons to participate in the Burn: AfrikaBurn and Burning Man respondents compared**
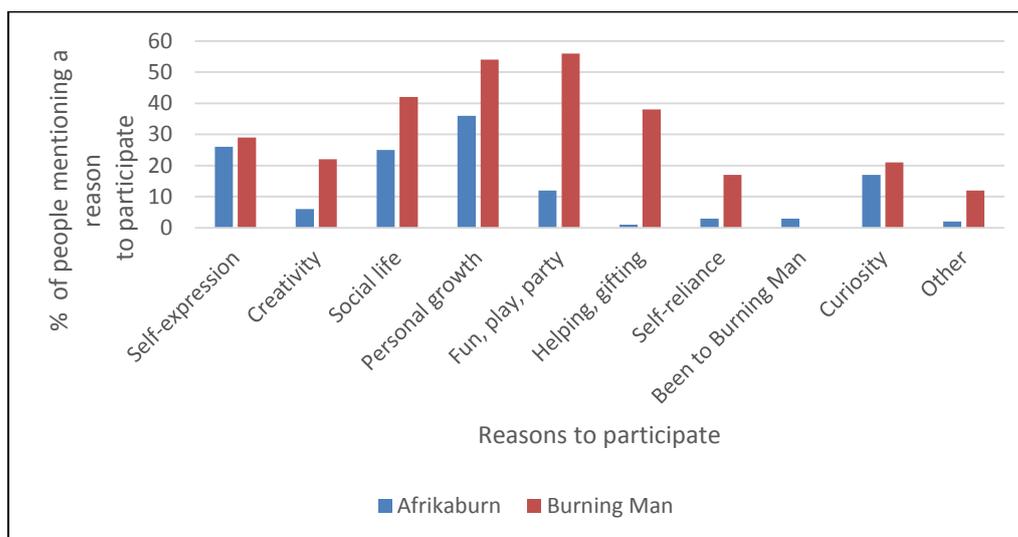


Multiple responses: AfrikaBurn: 250; Burning Man unknown.

The data in Figure 7 shows that an equal percentage of participants in the two events sought an avenue for self-expression: Just under 30% of respondents expressed the desire freedom and radical self-expression. A sense of curiosity was also a key factor in both events. In both AfrikaBurn and Burning Man, personal growth was the main reason for participating in the Burn; this includes the desire to grow or connect spiritually, or to escape an alienating default world. Interestingly, certain motivations were much more prevalent in Burning Man, rather than in AfrikaBurn: These include the desire for fun, helping and gifting, and environmental self-reliance.

A slightly related question is people's perceptions about the 11 key principles which animate AfrikaBurn.  Both Burning Man and AfrikaBurn constantly emphasise these values (AfrikaBurn 2015b):

"1.   Radical inclusion:  Anyone may be a part of AfrikaBurn. We welcome and respect the stranger.
2.   Gifting:  We are devoted to acts of gift giving. Gifting does not contemplate a return or an exchange for something of equal value.
3.   Decommodification: Our community seeks to create social environments that are unmediated by commercial sponsorships, transactions, or advertising.
4.   Radical self-reliance: AfrikaBurn encourages the individual to discover, exercise and rely on his or her inner resources.

5.  Radical self-expression:  Radical self-expression arises from the unique gifts of the individual. No one other than the individual or a collaborating group can determine its content. It is offered as a gift to others. In this spirit, the giver should respect the rights and liberties of the recipient.
6.  Communal effort: Our community values creative cooperation and collaboration. We strive to produce, promote and protect social networks, public spaces, works of art, and methods of communication that support such interaction.
7.  Civic responsibility: We value civil society. Community members who organise events should assume responsibility for public welfare and endeavour to communicate civic responsibilities to participants. They must also assume responsibility for conducting events in accordance with national and local laws.
8.  Leaving no trace: Our community respects the environment. We are committed to leaving no physical trace of our activities wherever we gather.
9.  Participation: Our community is committed to a radically participatory ethic. We believe that transformative change, whether in the individual or in society, can occur only through the medium of deeply personal participation. We achieve being through doing. Everyone is invited to work and play.
10.  Immediacy: Immediate experience is, in many ways, the most important value in our culture. We seek to overcome barriers that stand between us and a recognition of our inner selves, the reality of those around us, participation in society, and contact with a natural world exceeding human powers.”

In addition to these ten principles (somewhat reminiscent of the Old Testament Ten Commandments), AfrikaBurn has added its own value: “Each One Teach One”: As a self-reliant community, we believe the responsibility of spreading our culture lies with each and every one of us.”

At both AfrikaBurn and Burning Man, these values have become an important normative framework, that shapes the ethos and culture of the event, and can therefore be described as a “performative ideology” intended to be enacted (Gilmore 2005: 81).

Our interviewees were asked which *three* principles were most important for them. When people could not remember what the principles actually were, a list was provided.

**Figure 10: Preferences for the 11 principles at AfrikaBurn**
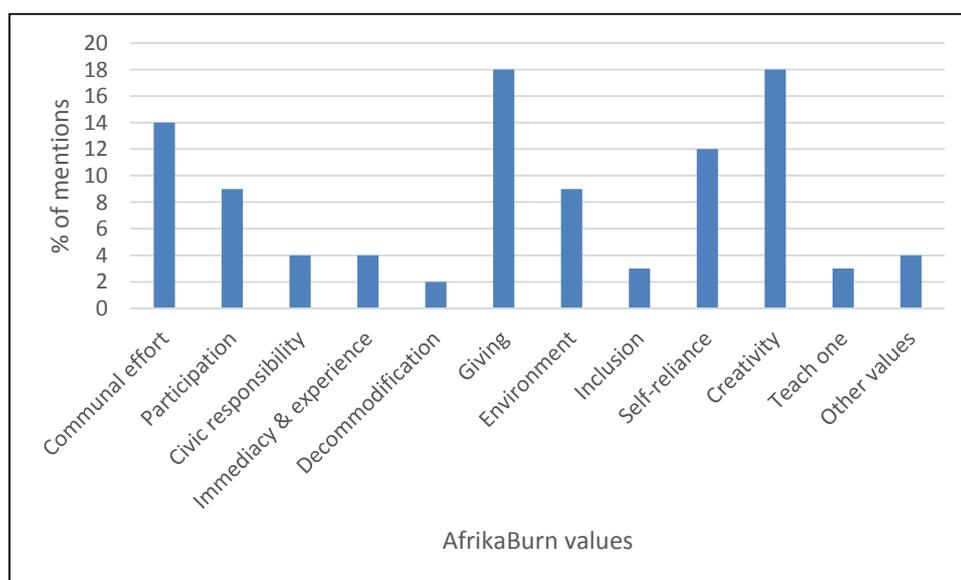


N=483 responses

These responses are not necessarily based on a deep reflection on these values; rather, they tended to be the ones which people recalled most easily. A more in-depth analysis would require different research methods. However, it is probable that these values stuck in people's minds because they made the most sense to them.

The two main themes are *creativity* and *social relationships* (which encompass communal effort, giving, participation and civic responsibility taken together).  The extent of volunteering in the process of organising AfrikaBurn every year is testament to this appreciation of communal effort. In the context of Burning Man, the concept of "communitas", referring to "a quality of social relationship that was ideally unmediated by normative social structures" (Gilmore 2005: 179).

*Immediacy*, or immersing oneself in the experience, accounted for only 4% of responses. Perhaps this suggests that some people may prefer to come and watch, rather than participate.

 *Decommodification* accounted for only 2% of responses. It is proable that people's understanding of "decommodification" may be rather limited; it is a normative value which has aroused some debate in the Burning Man context. Proponents of Burning Man maintain that they are not against *commerce*, but against *commodification* – whereas "commerce" denotes barter and trade, "commodification" refers to the reduction of social relationships to saleable commodities.  However, barter and trade are indeed banned at these festivals, mainly to give participants a break from the relentless commodification of life in the "default world". AfrikaBurn, like Burning Man, have resisted any kinds of corporate sponsorship, product placement or "co-branding" (Gilmore 2005: 96).  Decommodification is also not the same as anti-materialism; at both Burning Man and AfrikaBurn, participants can arrive in any kind of upmarket vehicles or use any fancy gadgets they may choose. Our observations at the event showed that many people arrived in fairly opulent vehicles (some sporting business logos, which is frowned upon by the event managers), suggesting that many people did not really identify with the anti-commercial spirit of the event.

*Environmental awareness* accounted for only 8% of responses, but *self-reliance* (no food, water or shelter is provided at the camp) accounted for 12%. Together, they suggest that a significant minority of people found the environment attractive and/or challenging.

The missionary impetus of the event ("Each One Teach One") accounted for only 3% of responses. However, as seen earlier, 82% of interviewees had heard about the event via "word of mouth"; this suggests that many people actually are spreading the message of the event, and implicitly, of its values – even if they are not deliberately spreading the message of the event's values *per se.*  The importance of informal, friend-to-friend communications, often via social media, has always been an important part of Burning Man as well (Kelly 1997).  These events are hardly advertised; they grow organically.

Several interviewees (20 responses, or 4% of the total responses) had forgotten the "official" values of the Burn, or were not interested at looking at the official list, and therefore they cheerfully provided other values they considered important: Kindness, Friendship, Love, Trust, Altruism, Humanism, Compassion, Harmony, Honesty, and Joy.  Many of these are of course quite compatible with the "official" values, but it is interesting to see how they had infused the event with their own normative terminology.

At Burning Man, some long-time participants have noted that some of these principles are becoming less effective, and that a growing number of new arrivals sometimes fail to embrace these values (Gilmore 2005: 81).  Longitudinal studies of AfrikaBurn would be useful to determine if such trends are also prevalent here.

**Influence of AfrikaBurn beyond the event itself**

The Burning Man Festival in Nevada is not meant to provide a week of hedonism and play; it is regarded by enthusiasts as having "the ability to change the world, the ability to teach people a new way of not just surviving but thriving" (Doherty 2000:29). "One test of whether the transformational experiences are genuinely altering or simply awe-inspiring is whether participants implement their new meaning-making system upon returning to the so-called "default world" or slip back into old habits" (Bottorff 2015: 58).

People were also asked whether the values of AfrikaBurn have influenced their actions in normal life (the so-called "Default World").

**Figure 11: Influence of AfrikaBurn experiences on participants' everyday life**
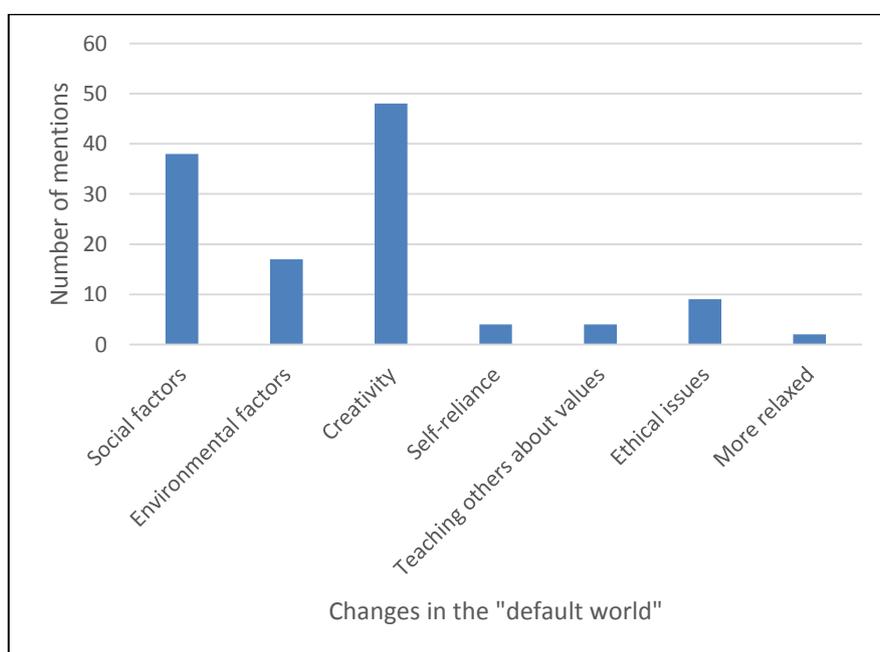


N=122 responses

A total of 123 responses (83% of 149 responses) were positive, suggesting that the values do permeate beyond the event site itself.

When asked how they had been influenced by the AfrikaBurn event, many people (40% of responses) focused the psychological dimensions of the experience: Seeing new things, experiencing art, getting new perspectives, being inspired, being more open-minded,  more spiritual, doing things differently, being more understanding, being less structured, "having more freedom to express myself", thinking outside the box, enjoying small things, experiencing a sense of harmony, being more balanced, more willing to learn, living life passionately, and being self-aware.

The second-largest group of responses (31%) involved social factors: More kindness, friendliness, giving, a sense of community, forgiveness, openness with strangers, "live and let live", hospitality, "love is everywhere", being more accepting, more tolerant, having faith in humanity, and relating better to people.

Then there were environmental influences: Being more careful about litter, caring for the environment, and conserving water (14%).

In addition to these major influences, there were several minor ones. Some people have a stronger ethical sense (7%), expressed as: "I am a better person", "I have stronger values and principles", and "I am more authentic".  Some people felt more self-reliant (3%) after learning to cope in the desert; some were more inclined to tell other people about their values (3%); and a few (2%) found themselves to be more mellow, relaxed and less stressed about the values of the "default world".

This propensity to see the "default world" differently, and to act differently, is often echoed in the literature on Burning Man. Feldman (2013:21), for example, describes its impact as "Social change agents sprinkled around the world. A framework that catalyzes a personal encounter with this yearning for a better world, whether fulfilled or frustrated, is itself rare and is a first step toward change" (Feldman 2013: 21.

## Why is AfrikaBurn growing so rapidly?

Burning Man in Nevada had grown to about 70 000 people by 2015. Some of its originators were dismayed by this Topsy-like growth pattern, and withdrew from the event; however, certain key leadership figures wanted as many people as possible to have the opportunity to experience this life-changing event (Gilmore 2005: 12), and that it should grow indefinitely (Doherty 2000: 32). Participants at AfrikaBurn were asked about the evidently growing social appeal of the event. In this question, people are asked to think about what makes AfrikaBurn appeal to *other* people. The largest group of responses (43%) can be categorised as "growth as a natural phenomenon", expressed as follows: People experience curiosity, they hear about the popularity of the event, news and photos are sent around.  (It is astonishing to consider that AfrikaBurn undertakes no advertising at all).

The event is becoming trendy, possibly because the middle class is growing, there is a perceived social need for the event, and the brand is becoming known.  Some respondents referred to a possible Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) syndrome.  Other responses referred to specific attractions of the event.  Ten percent of the responses referred to the creativity involved in AfrikaBurn:  Issues such as self-expression, people come back changed, people push their boundaries, or expand their consciousness, or discover a different mindset. Related to this perspective is the six percent who believed that the event is growing for broadly "spiritual" reasons, expressed as: People have "positive feelings, inspiration, deal with disenchantment, feeling their inner desires, having a passion for good, a growth in consciousness, and an having a new experience of life and beauty.

Another eight percent of responses referred to the appeal of "escape from reality"; and four percent of the responses to its uniqueness: It is a new experience, and people like to try something different. There were several kinds of responses which referred to social issues. Eight percent referred to the culture of generosity, the sense of social harmony, sharing, connected, giving, and sense of community.

Six percent referred to the "fun factor":  People like to be happy, to experience hype, to enjoy life, and to party. Other isolated responses referred to the good organisation of the event, and the desert environment (only three responses).

### Table 2: Why is AfrikaBurn growing?

| Responses | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Gifting | 15 | 8 |
| Natural growth due to popularity | 77 | 43 |
| Unique | 7 | 4 |
| Freedom | 8 | 5 |
| Creativity | 18 | 10 |
| Escape | 15 | 8 |
| Self-reliance | 2 | 1 |
| Fun | 10 | 6 |
| Spiritual | 11 | 6 |
| Concept is popular | 8 | 5 |
| Location | 3 | 2 |
| Other | 3 | 2 |
| Growth is a bad thing | 2 | 1 |
| Total | 179 | 100.0 |

N=179 responses

**What do Burners not like about the event?**

Interviewees were asked an open-ended question about aspects that they did not enjoy.  At least 40% of the responses were "nothing", suggesting that many people find the event very satisfying.  The other responses were varied and complex.

### Table 3: What do Burners not enjoy about the Burn?

| Types of complaints | Number of mentions | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Nothing is wrong with it at all | 69 | 40 |
| Toilets are unpleasant | 12 | 7 |
| The wrong kinds of people are coming, it is becoming inauthentic, and it is becoming too commercial | 21 | 12 |
| Too noisy | 20 | 12 |
| People are not "giving" enough | 6 | 4 |
| Too much Litter | 13 | 7 |
| Roads are poor | 4 | 2 |
| Too much social control | 4 | 2 |
| Too many drugs | 6 | 4 |
| Too much dust | 4 | 2 |
| Too much deviant social behaviour | 4 | 2 |
| Too much partying | 4 | 2 |
| Other | 5 | 3 |
| Total | 173 | 100.0 |

N=173 responses

The second-most important dislike was the constant heavy noise (20 responses, or 12% of the total), often referring to the noise at night (endless partying by some enthusiastic Burners), and that it was difficult to get rest or sleep.   The third-most prevalent dislike was more subtle, and referred to the type of participants attending AfrikaBurn.  These included: The event is getting too big; there are too many kids; it is becoming too "yuppie"; more "weekend warriors" are attending the event; and that more diversity of participants is needed.

These concerns are probably inevitable. However, they may suggest a deeper seismic shift: that AfrikaBurn is now growing beyond the original core group of people with a deep value commitment to the event, and now includes a more diverse set of participants, often with more materialistic and hedonistic values. Six people (4% of mentions) assert that people are not sharing, not giving, not participating, and are more egotistic.  Three people mentioned that the event is becoming more commercial, too consumerist, with too much advertising allowed on the site, or losing its authenticity.  In the same vein, there were six people who mentioned drug and liquor consumption (and under-age drinking).  Four people mentioned excessive partying; it is becoming a "rave", instead of an art festival.  Five people mentioned social problems:  Stealing, public urinating and, (rather alarmingly), one mention of rape. These numbers are surprisingly small, given the large numbers of people involved; it echoes the experience at Burning Man, where acts of violence, assaults and rape have been very occasional and rare (Gilmore 2005: 100).

These observations raise profound questions for the organisers. Should the event grow indefinitely?  Should participants' behaviour at the event be more tightly monitored and controlled? Some people resent efforts to manage social behaviour.  Four people complained that there was too much control, and that the police were too much in evidence. In fact, AfrikaBurn is similar to Burning Man: There are police patrols, alongside festival volunteers (Doherty 2000:29).  In Nevada, drug dealers are arrested, and such enforcement is supported by the festival organisers, on the grounds that it violates the "no vending" rule. AfrikaBurn has volunteer rangers responsible for safety, mediation, encouraging adherence to the 11 principles, and general walkabout; there are also policemen strolling around and – we noticed - generally turning a blind eye to recreational drug use. In both AfrikaBurn and Nevada, community rules are usually "enforced" by gentle persuasion.  In some ways, AfrikaBurn is still more "free" than Burning Man, where open campfires are banned on the grounds of safety (Doherty 2000: 31), public drug-taking is prohibited (Dyer 2006: 33), and company logos on vehicles are definitely unacceptable (Dyer 2006: 33).

At this point in the trajectory of the Burn, a choice may have to be made: To impose the values of the event more strictly (although some may argue that this would conflict with the value of "radical self-expression"); or to continue with a *laissez-faire* approach to the social ethos.  That the event is well-managed, at present, is quite clear (only one person complained of "chaotic" management). The issue is not one of effective management; it is one of promoting the underlying values and social philosophy.

Then there were several concerns about the physical environment.  Four people complained about the condition of the roads; however, given the fact that the roads to AfrikaBurn are indeed hazardous, the smallness of the number of complaints seems almost more significant. One gets the impression that the Burners have factored the roads into their total experience of the event, and even that it creates a kind of pride that they have triumphed over such roads to get to the site.  Four people complained about the dust, stones and heat; once again, the number is so small that it appears that people accept that it is a desert environment.

There are also concerns about the man-made environment, notably the problem of litter (13 mentions, or 8% of responses), and 12 people complained about the toilets.  These numbers are negligible; however, there may be some research bias here, because the survey was conducted at the beginning of the week, and these problems may have become more severe later on.  Managing litter (or MOOP, as it is called, "Matter Out Of Place", in AfrikaBurn parlance) has been an ongoing issue at Burning Man as well, with the organisers constantly raising public awareness of the need to manage litter responsibility (Gilmore 2005: 99).

Respondents were then asked what they would suggest to the organisation managers for future improvements. The largest number (65 out of 135 responses) said that there should not be any change at all – which is a significant vote of confidence in the event organisers.

**Table 4: Suggestions for improvement**

| Type of improvement suggested | Number of mentions | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Don't make any changes | 65 | 48 |
| Improve communication | 5 | 4 |
| Improve the environment – reduce litter and dust | 3 | 2 |
| Improve toilets | 6 | 4 |
| Noise: Enforce quiet times in early morning | 5 | 4 |
| Create bigger and better artworks | 4 | 3 |
| Constrain growth | 7 | 5 |
| Promote physical access (improve roads) | 4 | 3 |
| Promote diversity and variety | 9 | 7 |
| Planning issues | 10 | 7 |
| Education | 1 | 0.7 |
| Do not allow children | 2 | 2 |
| Managers should introduce themselves | 2 | 2 |
| Preserve the ethos of AfrikaBurn | 2 | 2 |
| Total | 135 | 100 |

N=135 responses

A few individual responses included: Lengthen the festival period; find a quieter solar alternative to the ice truck; have a formal opening event; provide showers, provide food, reduce commercialism, and remove the police.

Some of the other responses may offer some wise counsel to the organisers.  The most significant is the issue of social profile of the participants. Seven responses (5%) referred to the need to keep the event smaller, possibly by charging more. (However, that would undermine the principle of Radical Inclusion).   Two people maintained that young children should not be allowed (there should be a minimum age limit).  Two people felt that the ethos of AfrikaBurn was not being preserved properly, and one person wanted more to be given to the community. One person felt that people should be more educated about the values of the event, and five percent felt that a better guidebook, or other means of communication, should be promoted.  (Burning Man has a daily newspaper during its event).  One person felt that the growing commercialism of the event should be contained, and four wanted bigger, better artworks to be created ("or blow up more things"!). These mentions are not many in number, but provide some food for thought.

The concern with communication is surprising, since the organisers issue an excellent survival guide, pocket-sized guide book and programme; however, perhaps the medium of the communication (a printed document) does not appeal to all the participants.  It is not clear how this can be addressed, given that there is no cell phone signal at the site.  Perhaps more posters are needed to communicate information about on-site events.

A related set of comments can broadly be classified as "promoting diversity and variety". Nine comments referred to the need for more theme camps, encouraging different styles of music, discouraging weekenders, making the event available for poorer people, promoting inclusivity, and reducing prices. Although these comments are in a minority, it reflects a seam of opinion that the organisers can do more to stimulate creative and varied offerings.
Two particular responses are worth noting: Two people felt that the organisers should introduce themselves formally at the beginning of the event, and one person suggested an official opening ceremony. These comments suggest that there may be a need for participants to interact more closely with the organisers, and/or to express their appreciation for their work.

Table 4 above includes several practical suggestions related to planning and operational matters.  However, the paper posed the question: Is AfrikaBurn simply a hedonistic extravaganza, or does it have a notable social or psychological significance?  The findings show that the majority of interviewees experience the event as life-changing, in ways which enrich their perceptions, creativity, social interactions and even spiritual insights. AfrikaBurn is great fun, but it offers deeper transformative potential as well. The comments (and criticisms) mentioned by the respondents are typically of a very constructive and insightful nature. Clearly, the event is not simply a party and a rave; it is an opportunity for participants to have an extraordinarily creative experience, and their responses showed how earnestly they grappled with the values of the event.

**Conclusion**

AfrikaBurn has experienced an extraordinary popularity and growth, and clearly appeals to a sector of the South African population. Its broad similarity, in spirit and organisation, to Burning Man in Nevada suggests that the participants in both locations share a similar cultural orientation which can be broadly described as creative, exploratory, individualistic and yet community-oriented, critical of mainstream culture yet well-placed within it to afford extreme adventures, irreverent and playful but also searching for new systems of meaning.

In the American case, these are strong post-modern values. That these values are also strong in a developing country such as South Africa, is remarkable. Interestingly, this suggests that the urban middle class in South Africa may share a great deal of values and priorities with urban middle class folk in the United States. While the two events are broadly similar, the contexts differ greatly. It is likely that South Africa, with its very recent experience of democracy, non-racialism, secularism and extensive poverty and deprivation will pose interesting challenges to Burners when they return home?  The findings of this survey, which show the diversity and power of individuals' experiences at the event, implicitly pose a next round of questions for deeper reflection about the AfrikaBurn phenomenon.

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