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Maximising Tourism and Economic Growth Through Rural Festivals: A Stakeholder-Centred Approach

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Abstract

This study aimed to critically examine rural festival events' leveraging opportunities for tourism and socioeconomic benefits. An exploratory sequential mixed-methods research design was employed to gather data from a diverse range of Keiskammahoek Music and Art Festival (KMAF) stakeholders to achieve this aim. The first phase of data collection was qualitative data where semi-structured interviews (n=9) were conducted with the event organiser and local businesses. From that set of data, a questionnaire survey was formulated and administered to Keiskammahoek residents (n=326) using a simple random sampling technique. The study findings demonstrate how well-utilised rural festival events can encourage locals to travel and expand their options for domestic travel to rural locations while contributing positively to the economic development of these areas. However, the study highlights the need for enhanced cooperation among the various stakeholders involved in tourism and festival events in rural areas, aiming to maximise their potential contributions. Resultantly, there is a need for effective stakeholder management, and ultimately effective leveraging for the promotion and socioeconomic development of rural spaces through festivalisation.

Keywords Rural festivals; events tourism; events leveraging; local economic development; rural tourism

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Introduction

Festivals are a typology of events that have drawn increasing academic and political attention over the years (Slabbert et al., 2009). It can be argued that the significance of such events has increased over the past decade, and they no longer just serve to bring tourists to a destination but to further promote destination planning and management agendas (Ezeuduji, 2023). These events are significant in that they have economic, sociocultural, political, and psychological effects on host communities. For instance, they have been proven to enhance visitor spending, combat seasonality, promote tourism geographical spread, and leverage tourism benefits for host destinations (Dragin-Jensen & Kwiatkowski, 2019; Koreman, 2023). Hazel & Mason (2020), as well as Wallace & Michopoulou (2019), point out that festivals promote tourism marketing and inward investment in host regions. Others have noted how festivals promote sociability and leisure time spent with friends, family, and tourists, especially in the context of rural areas (Binder et al., 2023; Markovic et al., 2019). As a socioeconomic activity, festivals have become an important tool for reimagining and rebranding cities and regions as cultural tourism hotspots (Bob et al., 2019; Ezeuduji, 2023; Nyikana, 2017). In the context of developing nations, rural festival events have come to occur in relatively poor communities with limited infrastructure but which, nevertheless, tend to have a huge influence on the communities concerned (Ezeuduji, 2023; Nyikana, 2017). Rural festival events have significant benefits for host communities when compared to major and mega-events. These events improve local infrastructure and leverage existing community resources (Gibson et al., 2012; Peric et al., 2016; Smith, 2012). They are considered an aspect of festival tourism, which is a growing phenomenon that brings many tourists to rural areas who may otherwise not have visited such places (Cai et al., 2023; Mahon & Hyyryläinen, 2019). As a result, the hosting of rural festival events can promote rural development and economic sustainability for rural destinations while attracting visitors who otherwise would not have come to the area. This study advances the argument for festival tourism as a tool to leverage tourism benefits and economic development for rural areas. In this way, we move away from traditional event-leveraging studies, which have largely been dominated by sports mega-events and festivalisation within the urban context. Through the analysis of an annually recurring rural festival event, we argue that much potential exists for rural festival events to contribute to socioeconomic development and tourism growth in rural South Africa and beyond. In terms of the structural arrangement, the next section provides a detailed literature review. This is followed by the description and justification of the research methodology used for the study. Later, the findings and discussion are presented, followed by the concluding remarks.

Literature review

Rural festival events in context

Rural festival events often serve as gathering places for many community members and visitors alike, providing an opportunity for interaction and integration (Kwiatkowski et al., 2020). Peric et al. (2016) observe that rural festival events tend to be deeply

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ingrained in society and culture. Resultantly, from a developmental perspective, these festival events are increasingly being used as tools to achieve a variety of rural community development goals and ambitions (Brown & Massey, 2001). According to Qu & Cheer (2021), rural festival events are a useful vehicle through which rural assets can be preserved and innovation encouraged in rural communities. This is because they often produce and recreate histories that shape rural community beliefs, customs, and certain forms of behaviour, making them central to the livelihoods of rural society. Given these benefits and the need to combat rural decline and population loss, rural festival events might become increasingly effective in terms of encouraging young people to stay in the rural regions or to move there and develop these areas (Kwiatkowski et al., 2020). Unlike large-scale and mega-festival events, rural festival events frequently make a deliberate effort to improve the rural community's quality of life, making them a key component of development in such areas (Ossowska et al., 2023; Radicchi, 2013). Furthermore, there has been an increase in the number and variety of rural festival events, showing their increased importance in terms of both local tourism marketing and rural economic development (Anwar & Sohail, 2004). Against such growth and their importance, the academic neglect of rural festival tourism can be seen as being unexpected given their growth in volume and significance in recent years (Getz & Page, 2016).

Leveraging rural festival events

Studies have shown that festival events generate significant amounts of revenue for the communities in which they take place (Jani & Mwakyusa, 2021; Ma & Lew, 2012; Rogerson & Harmer, 2015). These events present host communities with the platform to share their culture, environment, and, most importantly, 'spending opportunities' with visitors. Some researchers have argued that rural event leveraging can be beneficial in terms of maximizing short-term and long-term economic, social, and environmental benefits for the host rural community concerned (Kwiatkowski et al., 2020; Mahon & Hyyryläinen, 2019; Qu & Cheer, 2021). Festival events are viewed as one of the ways to raise money and fight poverty, especially in rural communities (Peterman et al., 2020; Saayman & Rossouw, 2011; Werner et al., 2020). The festival events allow informal businesses, such as food stalls, to generate income during the event by selling goods and services to the event attendees, event planners, and the local community (Cudny, 2013; Nyikana & Tichaawa, 2024). This latter benefit is what has encouraged many rural areas to aggressively pursue the regular hosting of festival events in their local areas, with the festival often inextricably linked with informal entrepreneurship opportunities (Nyikana & Tichaawa, 2024). However, for this link to be effectively exploited in the sustainable development of rural festivals, a deliberate effort to leverage these festivals is needed. Chalip (2004) identifies four strategies for attaining intermediate leveraging of festival events: (A) increasing visitor spending; (B) extending visitor stays; (C) retaining event expenses; and (D) using the event to fortify local business ties. Additionally, there are two complementary ways to use event media to promote an event and its host region: (E) using the event in regional advertising and promotions and (F) showcasing the region through event advertising and reporting (Chalip, 2004; O'Brien & Chalip, 2007). According to Chalip's (2004) economic leveraging model, an event can maximise its trade and revenue generation by attracting guests and enticing them to spend more time and money there than they otherwise might have, keeping event funds in the host city, using local suppliers, and fostering business relationships through the event by providing networking opportunities or event hospitability. Thus, rural festivals offer a special chance for community involvement, cultural preservation, and economic development (Kwiatkowski et al., 2020; Radicchi, 2013). Leveraging rural festivals would therefore mean that local businesses may boost sales, local artisans can showcase their traditional goods, and tourist numbers can increase, resulting in much-needed revenue for rural areas and their economies (Kwiatkowski et al., 2020). The leveraging model also highlights how the media, including advertising and other promotional efforts, can enhance the host city's image and pave the way for longer-term beneficial effects on tourism than would have otherwise been feasible (Schulenkorf et al., 2022). In the context of this study, the argument is that the rural festivals draw tourists looking for genuine experiences and operate as venues for promoting local heritage (Mahon & Hyyryläinen, 2019). Additionally, in terms of such a plan, the leveraging model views festival attendees and media as strategic opportunities that offer immediate and long-term leverage opportunities for rural development (Kennelly, 2022). As a result, when used well, rural festivals could promote sustainable economic growth and instil a great sense of pride in the community (Qu & Cheer, 2021).

Methodology

This study was conducted in Keiskammahoek, which is part of the former Ciskei in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa (Dalvit et al., 2014). Keiskammahoek is a rural area marked by chronic poverty and a scarcity of social services (Deliwe, 1995; Morrison et al., 2001). Keiskammahoek and the surrounding areas are known for their natural environment, mountain ranges, forests, culture, and wildlife, making it an important ecotourism destination (Sixaba, 2023). Some of the most popular tourist attractions around the area and its broader surroundings include King Sandile's Grave, Kraal, Cave, and Dam, which were named after King Mgolombane Sandile Ngqika (a prominent Xhosa King), as well as the Ntaba ka Ndoda monument near Dimbaza, making the areas popular for heritage and ecotourism activities. In recent times, many visitors to the area have been drawn by the Keiskammahoek Music and Arts Festival [KMAF] (see Figure 1 below), the case study for this research on rural festival event leveraging.

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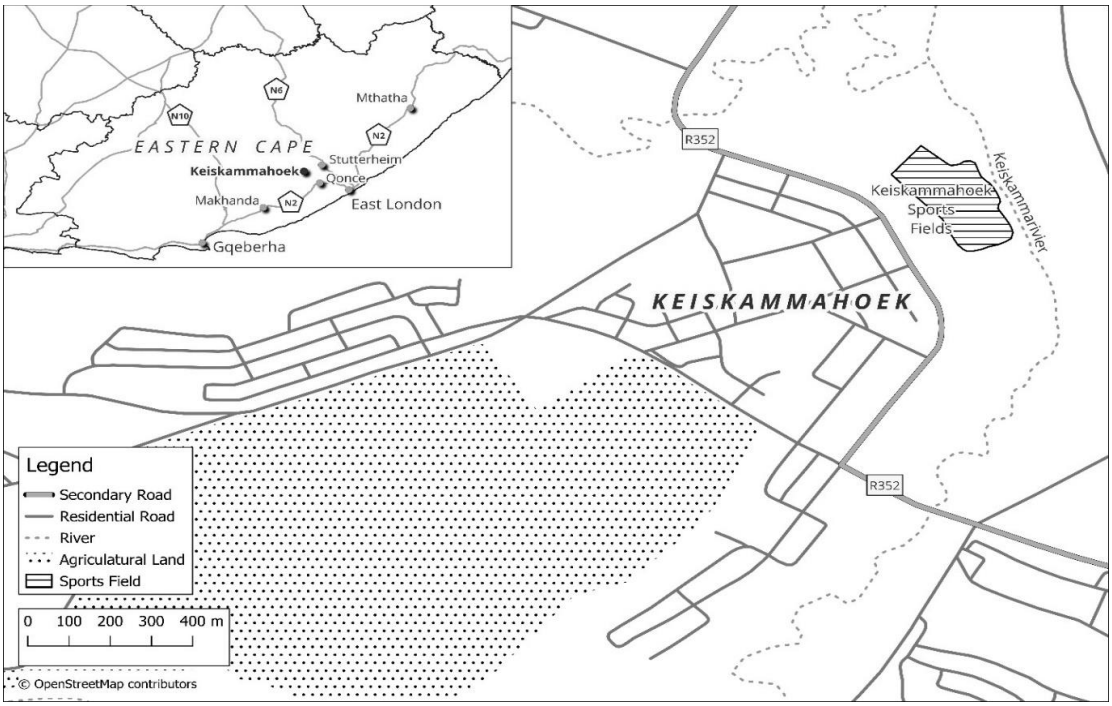

Figure 1: Map of Keiskammahoek and festival location (Keiskammahoek Sports Fields)

The study adopted an exploratory sequential mixed-method research approach. The first phase of data collection entailed qualitative in-depth online interviews (n=9) with key stakeholders involved in the festival. The stakeholders were approached based on their participation and interest in, as well as experiences related to, the festival. These included the event owner as well as the formal local businesses associated with the event, as shown in Table 1 below. To protect the identity of the participants, codes were used as shown in the table in the presentation of the findings. Thematic analysis was used in the analysis of the interview data.

Table 1: Interview participants

Code	Location	Type of establishment	Position
EO1	East London	KMAF	Event owner
FB1	Keiskammahoek	Local restaurant	Manager
FB2	Keiskammahoek	Local tavern	Owner
FB3	Keiskammahoek	Local restaurant	Owner
FB4	Keiskammahoek	Local restaurant	Owner
FB5	Keiskammahoek	Local supermarket	Manager
FB6	Keiskammahoek	Local restaurant and supermarket	Supervisor
FB7	Keiskammahoek	Local restaurant	Owner
FB8	Keiskammahoek	Local hardware store and supermarket	Owner

The second phase consisted of a structured survey that was administered face-to-face to the residents of Keiskammahoek (n=326). The data were gathered using the simple random sampling method, employing a 5 km radius from the town centre where the event was held, including a number of villages that surrounded the town. In order to facilitate a better understanding of the leveraging potential of the festival, only residents who had attended the event in the last two years were included in the sample. This allowed for the assessment of some of the socioeconomic aspects associated with the event. The data was captured and analysed with the IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences [SPSS] software, and the findings are presented below.

Results and findings

Demographic profile

In the screening question before the commencement of the survey, all respondents (100%) indicated having attended the festival at least once before. From a sociodemographic perspective, the majority of those surveyed (52.8%) were young South Africans between the ages of 18 and 35 who were educated, with most of them having completed secondary education (45.7%). The gender representation was equally split between males (48.3%) and females (48.3%). In terms of employment status, a significant majority of the respondents were employed (75.7%) and arguably had a propensity to spend on festival-related items, including entry tickets, activities, drinks, and food. As a result, when asked to estimate how much they spent in their last attendance at the festival, the majority of them estimated having spent a total of R2000 or less.

Table 2: Demographic profiles of respondents

Characteristics	Category	Percentage of total (n=326)
Age	18–24	17.5
	25–34	35.3
	35–44	33.7
	45–54	12.0
	55–64	1.5
Gender	Female	48.3
	Male	48.3
	Prefer not to say	3.4
Highest qualification	No formal education	5.5
	Primary school completed	4.6
	Secondary school completed	45.7
	Diploma or certificate	27.9
	Undergraduate degree	8.0
	Postgraduate degree	8.3
Occupation	Full-time employed	46.8
	Part-time employed	17.5
	Student	13.8
	Self-employed	11.4
	Unemployed	10.5
Type of resident	Holiday visitors	58.9
	Local permanent residents	41.1
Estimated amount spent during previous festival attendance	0-1000	43.6
	1001-2000	32.1
	2001-3000	10.4
	3001-4000	4.8
	4001<	9.1

Stakeholders needed in rural festivals

The sociodemographic profiles presented above present a clear picture of the importance of local residents as key stakeholders in the development of rural festivals. In this regard, their spending potential and support for the festival and its activities are noted as being central to future development plans and leveraging activities of the rural festival. However, besides the residents, the interviews revealed a further need for the engagement of more stakeholders if the festival is to reach its potential. In this regard, the interviewees noted the need for sponsors, particularly from the public sector, more formal business sponsorship from the private sector, as well as involvement of the informal business sector in the event activities. The discussions revealed that as things stand, there was limited to no involvement from the other stakeholders as the festival was largely reliant on local private businesses for sponsorships. This was despite the marked importance of the festival in the economic development of the area. As noted by one of the interviewees, "The goal is to penetrate the public sector even more in terms of getting a sponsor because throughout the years we have never been sponsored by the government, NDT, Department or municipality, our sponsors have been mainly the private sector, and we relied on them" (EO1). This indicates that, as the festival continues to grow and attract hundreds of visitors annually to the region, more support and active involvement from the public sector, particularly the local government, will be needed. This is especially true when considering the role that the festival can potentially play in broader rural development initiatives enshrined in the local economic development strategies of the municipality. The findings also pointed to the need for more investments from the private sector, with a sentiment emerging that even if such investments were to come from international sponsors, it would greatly enhance the contributions of the event to the community. In this regard, the arguments were that the investment needed could be financial for the most part, but equally, the experience from international partners would greatly enhance the festival's growing reputation in the region. The interviewee argued, "Sponsors get a platform to contribute to our decisions as festival organisers and they also benefit from these decisions. They don't only sponsor finances, but they get value for their money and they are invited to comment on the organisational aspects of the festival" (EO1). Another added that, indeed, the festival provided them the opportunity to contribute ideas on how to maximise the festival opportunities for local businesses. In this regard, they highlighted the flexibility of the organisation in allowing them to place stalls around the festival venue, which resulted in sales of their products reaching greater heights than they otherwise would if they were limited in the way they set up. One such businessperson indicated that "The festival event supports the business by allowing us to rent a stall in the venue where the festival is held and sell throughout the festival night. This makes the business gain a lot of money" (FB7). In addition to this, the findings show a close relationship between the sponsorship of the festival and positive communication about those who sponsor as one participant noted, "Sponsors gain in terms of publicity. We market them and volunteer ourselves to speak positively or write reports about their corporate social responsibility. It's a mutually beneficial arrangement. We even join any marketing campaigns they might want to do" (EO1). This was noted as being very important, especially as the event had been a resounding success for many years. Many of the local businesses interviewed attested to this, emphasising the added benefits of being part of the festival being increased profits, exposure to new clientele and being able to market themselves through the limited sponsorship they could offer to the festival. One such businessperson observed, "I work closely with the organisers, such that I plan in advance for where my stall will be. I am able to then get that stall and make good profits from customers from different provinces of the country" (FB3). Another one suggested, "I suddenly get a lot more customers from different towns and provinces who buy much more than I would sell on regular business days" (FB7). It is evident that there are greater benefits from a more collaborative approach to festival management, as all key stakeholders stand to gain from working together. From a local business perspective, the added economic spending associated with the festival is a welcome boost and provides them with new markets that they otherwise would not have had access to. Many of these businesses indicated making specific plans to be part of the event as it created a platform to gain profits that are outside of their normal business activities, and to a degree far more superior on a daily comparison basis to normal business gains.

However, in the same vein, some of the other local businesses argued that they were never informed of the dates in time to make such arrangements. They argued that better communication and collaboration were needed so that they would be able to plan accordingly. From their perspective, the festival would ideally present them with the opportunity to gain new customers from the festival attendees, artists, and special guests. They felt that, if they were effectively involved in the planning of the festival, they would come up with ways to optimise their benefits from these new customers. They suggested that the festival could easily lead to business growth in terms of size and operations in the longer term as they would use the free marketing and exposure associated with the event to achieve this ambition. One such suggestion was that the organisers should communicate as soon as a date becomes available so that the businesses can put up posters and marketing material in their businesses and share flyers with their customers. This, in turn, would present a united front and provide better advertisement for the festival stakeholders. As raised by one of the business owners, "We don't get enough notice for the event, so we really can't plan well for it" (FB2). Another one put more weight on this argument, suggesting that "We don't work directly with the event organisers, and they don't give us much support. We could advertise the festival amongst our patrons, knowing that they will bring more people into the area anyway when the festival comes around. That way we all gain" (FB8). Another noted, "I just find out the dates by myself from people I know or from social media, then I prepare for it without the help of anyone. This makes it really difficult to plan for the festival" (FB1). Finally, amongst those who were critical of the collaboration efforts between all the stakeholders, there was a sentiment that the local businesses were taking a risk by renting stalls at the festival as this didn't guarantee sales. In this respect, they argued that if they were involved more in the planning, they could arrange the rental of stalls in an effective way, where there would be a degree of control over competition. They suggested, "The festival does not really support us except for getting us to rent stalls in the venue. But the rental is open to anyone who has the means so it can result in too many similar stalls selling the same things" (FB6). These sentiments point to a flawed communication process amongst the stakeholders and an even more uncoordinated collaboration process as there are mixed views on these two aspects around the festival. The negative views are important to look into given that many of the participants suggested that they make donations to the event and at times offer their services to the festival by cleaning the venue and its precinct before and after the festival has taken place. In return, the festival organisers argue that they return the favour by referring all their clients, especially the VIP attendees, to these local businesses. A mismatch of views around the festival exists amongst its stakeholders and this is an aspect that requires urgent attention in the endeavours to effectively leverage the festival and maximise its tourism and economic development opportunities.

Residents' perceptions on the impacts of KMAF event

Malfas et al. (2004) state that residents' support for an event is strongly influenced by the perceived economic impacts of the event. Additionally, Gursoy et al. (2011) opine that residents' support for an event is also significantly influenced by the perceived social effects of the event. Accordingly, Arcodia & Whitford (2007) outline that as the number and size of festivals grow in South Africa, so do the potential attendance and the social, environmental, and economic impacts. This section provides details regarding the perceptions of the socioeconomic impacts of the festival event on the Keiskammahoek residents. Residents were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with a 5-point Likert scale measurement in Tables 3 and 4 below. The measurement had options ranging from "strongly agree" (SA), "agree" (A), "neutral" (N), "disagree" (D), to "strongly disagree" (SD). For ease of interpretation and presentation, "strongly agree" and "agree" have been combined in the presentation of the findings, as have "strongly disagree" and "disagree". The first statement related to the job creation ability of the festival for the locals. In this regard, the majority of respondents (78.9%) agreed with the assertion that the KMAF creates job possibilities for locals, while only 16.9% disagreed. In a similar sentiment, a significant majority of the residents (74.6%) felt that the KMAF provided economic chances for locals. From an economic point of view, the findings are in line with the sentiments of the interview participants, who suggested that the festival is very important for the local economy in terms of the employment and economic opportunities leveraged by local businesses. This was observed by one business owner who suggested that "The business gains a lot more money from selling during the event than we do on normal business days. We even get new customers which makes our business grow and we normally employ temporary staff to cope with this period" (FB2). Another participant suggested that "In the area outside the festival venue, there are many people who couldn't get inside, who still buy things from the locals who sell drinks, food, and merchandise in that area" (EO1). In a similar sentiment, a businessperson suggested that "The music festival specifically starts in the evening, but from the morning hundreds of people will be outside the venue and this creates entrepreneurial opportunities, especially for food and beverage vendors" (FB6). This makes it quite evident that the KMAF encourages local people to pursue business informally or rent stalls in the event venue to sell their goods. In terms of infrastructural development, a sizable portion of respondents (67.8%) concurred that Keiskammahoek infrastructural development was aided by the KMAF. Furthermore, 68.1% of the respondents think that there is potential for the KMAF to develop further. In support of the above, one of the key informants during the interview commented that "I am fully satisfied with the event if only they can improve the roads from the neighbouring rural areas that lead to where the event is held because many people struggle with that. I also think the event should not only happen in December but also in Easter holidays and encourage more festivals like this to happen around the Keiskammahoek. They have a lot of potential for employment and business opportunities" (FB3.)

This suggests that there is potential for the KMAF to grow, but only if the government steps in to improve service delivery, especially the necessary road infrastructure in the rural areas. Respondents were further asked to indicate whether KMAF promotes the use of local goods and products. The majority of respondents (77.3%) agreed that KMAF uses locally produced goods and services. From a rural development perspective, these sentiments were very important, as rural festivals

should, as far as possible, make use of locally sourced goods and services as a means of leveraging the economic development opportunities. However, one of the respondents mentioned that "I buy my goods both locally and also outside the province because I might not find some of the goods in the province, so I stock them outside the province, and goods from outside the province are cheaper when I buy in bulk than when I buy locally. I buy locally when I have a shortage and need something immediately" (FB6). This is sensible when considering the nature of some of the businesses. It was refreshing to note that almost all the businesses indicated that they shopped locally since doing so was more affordable and convenient than shopping elsewhere. However, there was a sense of disappointment from some of the businesses who were well-vested in the festival that there seemed to be little effort put into incorporating local artists into the programme. For them, this was one of the biggest criticisms, given the high numbers of unemployed youth in the area who would benefit from the exposure presented by the festival. They argued that giving talented youth the platform would give them the chance to interact with established celebrities and may give them breakthroughs in the music and arts environment.

Table 3: Economic impacts of the KMAF (n=326, in %)

Economic impacts	SD	D	N	A	SA	M	STD D
The KMAF creates employment opportunities for the locals.	12.0	4.9	4.2	39.3	39.6	3.90	1.306
The KMAF creates business opportunities for the locals.	6.7	8.6	10.1	44.5	30.1	3.83	1.152
The KMAF leads to the development of the infrastructure in the Keiskammahoek.	7.1	8.6	16.5	42.6	25.2	3.70	1.145
There is potential to develop the KMAF further.	8.3	9.2	14.4	45.4	22.7	3.65	1.169
The KMAF uses local goods and products.	8.6	7.7	6.4	39.9	37.4	3.90	1.230

Table 4 below presents the findings in relation to some of the social aspects of the festival. The respondents were asked to indicate their agreement with the statement that there was a link between promoting the event and promoting the local attractions in Keiskammahoek. More than half of the respondents (69.0%) agreed that there is a correlation between the promotion of the event and local attractions. Thus, it was clear that residents felt that the growth of the festival, especially in terms of attracting visitors from beyond the region, would expose the tourist attractions to the visitors and hopefully induce return visitation. Additionally, a vast majority of them (76.4%) also believed that the festival provided opportunities for leisure and enjoyment. Such findings related to what a key informant mentioned in the interview, stating "…the general community, they are benefiting by having entertainment, because entertainment is part of our society, and it is good when it is in a much-formalised manner, rather than just being outside doing whatever" (EO1). The findings above are in line with existing literature which states that local festivals and gatherings, which are primarily hosted for social, recreational and entertainment purposes, are typically targeted at a local audience (Allen et al., 2022; Bladen et al., 2022; Ismail, 2015). Unsurprisingly, the majority of the respondents (78.6%) said the KMAF was well-planned and held in a convenient location. Further interviews with key informants revealed that, while being well-planned and situated in a good area, the festival required close supervision of both the audience and the venue. They suggested that "I am satisfied, what can be improved is safety because many people get robbed during the festival, lights in the event venue also need to be improved because in some places it gets very dark while in some there is light which makes it unsafe. There must be enough security at the gate so that event attendees can all pay, and we also pay as sellers so that the festival event can be controllable" (FB5). The above quote indicates that while generally satisfied with the event, there are pressing issues, especially around security, that should be addressed.

Table 4: Social impacts of the KMAF (n=326, in %)

Social impacts	SD	D	N	A	SA	M	SD
A link exists between promoting of the event and promoting of the local attractions in Keiskammahoek.	12.3	5.5	13.2	41.4	27.6	3.67	1.275
The KMAF provides opportunities for relaxation and entertainment.	7.4	3.7	12.5	49.4	27.0	3.85	1.089
The KMAF was well-planned and held in a convenient location.	6.4	4.0	11.0	43.6	35.0	3.97	1.096

Note: M = Mean; STD = Standard deviation

Discussion

This study aimed to critically examine rural festival events' leveraging opportunities for tourism and socioeconomic benefits. This study was developed on the basis of the regular neglect of festivals in rural settings in the extant literature. Research on the impact of rural festivals on tourism and community development remains limited, and rural areas have historically been overlooked in both festival programming and academic studies generally (Koreman, 2023). It can be argued, therefore, that this study shifts the focus to festivals held in rural spaces as they make a huge contribution to rural development and growth. Many of South Africa's rural areas are typified by high levels of poverty, crime, and youth unemployment. Despite these challenges and social ills, many of these rural areas continue to host several rural festival events, which have shown great potential to contribute to sustainable development and growth of the economies in those areas while making positive contributions to social development. Furthermore, there is a lack of clear policies to effectively integrate rural festivals into broader community development initiatives, especially through the effective leveraging of such festivals, and this study sought to address this gap. The study findings show that young, relatively well-educated, and employed people between the ages of 18 and 35 make up the majority of attendees of rural festival events. These results are consistent with a previous study by Makhooane (2017), who had almost the same results regarding attendance at festival events. These people are drawn by entertainment opportunities offered at the festival, and they spend around R2000.00 on festival activities. Additionally, both formal and informal businesses benefit from these attendees. Many such businesses confirmed that they tend to make more money from sales during the event

days than they usually do during their regular business days. They attributed this to the increased tourist market, particularly the hundreds of visitors from out of town and other provinces who visit the area for the purpose of attending the event. In terms of the stakeholders needed for the successful hosting of rural festivals, it was found that sponsors, informal and formal businesses, event attendees, and the local community are all important stakeholders. Such stakeholders all play distinct roles and contribute significantly to the development of the KMAF. For example, when the festival event is successful, the sponsors gain publicity from it, while businesses gain profits and growth. In the same vein, the locals benefit through employment, entrepreneurship, enhanced quality of life, and entertainment value. However, it was discovered that it is insufficient for the KMAF to have only private-sector sponsors and that there is a pressing need to engage the public sector and international investors for further sponsorship. Importantly, there was an evident lack of collaboration amongst these different stakeholders, with a few businesses blaming the festival organisers for this. On the other hand, the festival organiser identified a lack of support from the public sector as being a major influence in the lack of integrated collaboration amongst the stakeholders. Events have been identified as one of the most prominent tools in the economic development of local areas (Bob et al., 2019). The KMAF has been demonstrated to generate jobs by means of creating temporary employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for both formal and informal businesses. Equally, they make positive contributions to infrastructural development, albeit a need exists for further developments in this regard to better connect the rural areas with each other and the main town where the event takes place. Arguably, this is part of the broader rural development planning and linking it to the festival's development trajectory may fast-track an already existing plan. Rural festival activities not only generate jobs but also present the locals with business opportunities. The KMAF was viewed as having the potential to grow, with its potential capable of being realised by acquiring extra marketing channels to enable the effective promotion of its activities. This was also linked to the willingness of the local businesses to participate in the marketing and promotion of the festival in its build-up, which they argued would maximise the marketing of the region generally. This validates what Ossowska et al. (2023) state, that showcasing the rural community in event advertising, as well as incorporating the rural festival event into place marketing campaigns, can improve that particular rural community's image.

Conclusion

This study makes a modest contribution to rural festival development, in terms of which we make a strong argument that these festivals can serve as powerful agents for economic growth and cultural preservation while bringing about much-needed community development. However, for this to happen, there is a need to strategically plan for the festival, adopting an inclusive approach that considers local residents, local businesses and both the private and public sectors in aspects of the festival development and planning. Moreover, there is a need for the adoption of modern marketing techniques, particularly social media, to drive the promotion activities of the festival, as many of the attendees are youthful, and a better digital footprint for marketing the event is needed. In addition to this, the festival should be directly linked to regional tourism development, especially adopting effective public-private partnerships for tourism and economic development in rural areas. Doing so should result in employment and entrepreneurial opportunities while also strengthening social cohesion and facilitating cultural exchange between visitors and residents alike. Ultimately, government support is needed to achieve all these goals, in the same way as there is a pressing need to actively engage and involve local communities in festival activities. This holistic approach should contribute to a stakeholder-centred approach to leveraging the festival as a vibrant economic development opportunity in the region.

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