Cultural Events as a Strategy for Sustainable Relationships among Key Players

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Abstract

It is through various events that culture connects diverse societies while simultaneously separating them in terms of identity and uniqueness. Cultural events are thus attended avidly by numerous people in their quest for unique cultural experiences. Moreover, as they are perceived in some societies as traditional and even sacred phenomena, cultural events are an inducement for tourist turnout that results in tourism and economic growth. As a result of its cultural appeal, the Umkhosi weLembe event evokes a sense of belonging and cultural pride amongst local residents and attracts domestic and international visitors alike. Conversely, in some parts of the world cultural events may engender socio-cultural conflict between local residents and tourists, especially if the events have not been properly organized or managed. Strategic management (SM) is therefore considered essential for uniting local residents and tourists who share the mutual desire for an event's satisfactory an uplifting ambience. This paper highlights SM as a fundamental requisite for rendering Umkhosi weLembe a catalyst for sustainable relationships between local residents and tourists.

Keywords: Sustainable cultural event tourism; strategic management (SM); Umkhosi weLembe; social cohesion; King Shaka

Introduction

Tourism is widely recognized as a specialist sector that encompasses accommodation, hospitality, transportation, entertainment, and tourist attractions. Cooper et al. (2008: 5) define tourism as "the temporary movement of people to destinations outside their normal places of stay or residence, the activities undertaken during their stay in those destinations, and the facilities created to cater for their needs". This latter definition is generally regarded as definitive. Event tourism emerged during the 1990s due to increased competition among tourist destinations to attract visitors (Etiosa, 2012). Subsequently, numerous event tourism corporations, firms, and associations (e.g., the International Special Events Society [ISES] and the International Association of Exhibition and Events [IAEE]) have been established to meet socio-economic, socio-cultural, and environmental goals in tourism (Allen et al., 2000). According to Getz (1997: 16), the term 'event' is a dual-pronged concept as organizers view an event as an activity that occurs once or frequently outside the normal program of the

organizing or sponsoring body, while visitors see it as an opportunity for acquiring experiences beyond the everyday norm. As practical phenomena, cultural events vary in terms of background and content, but the most popular ones are those that cherish culture and heritage (Blešić et al., 2014). This new phenomenon has given rise to a multitude of palpable and impalpable products that are offered by tourist destinations and that are continuously being sought after and enjoyed as unique experiences, even amid global health crises (Gumede & Mdiniso, 2022; Muresherwa et al., 2022). Rogerson and Rogerson (2021) perceive cultural events as a niche tourism product, arguing that they should be accorded specific attention as they have been propagated as an effective post-Covid-19 recovery strategy. Visiting destinations that embrace culture and host cultural events is one way of fulfilling this nostalgic desire, as such visits enhance tourists' cultural enrichment, personal satisfaction, and inclination to return (Mendes et al., 2011). By definition, a cultural event is a traditional phenomenon that signifies the character and importance of people, a community, a society, a place, a locality, and a nation (Bowdin et al., 2001). Such events are cautiously planned and hosted to commemorate or celebrate special occasions or to achieve specific social, cultural, or corporate goals and objectives (Bowdin et al., 2006; Allen et al., 2000). In this context, South African tourist destinations attract both international and domestic tourists who wish to enjoy their unique cultural, scenic, and natural resources (Gumede, 2022; Mokoena, 2020). Because cultural events have boomed in the global tourism and leisure industry (van Niekerk, 2016; Li & Petrick, 2006), their sustainability has become an important field in contemporary research enquiry (Séraphin et al., 2018), particularly as they occur at the origin point (as a push factor) and at the destination point (as a pull factor) in tourism marketing and development (Getz & Page, 2016). It is undeniable that such events have become pivotal for the socio-economic and socio-cultural well-being of host destinations (Šušić & Dordević, 2011).

Certain attributes contribute to cultural events' uniqueness, such as the fact that they facilitate visitors' active participation and involvement and have special appeal due to their limited duration and natural simplicity (Maguire & Hanrahan, 2017; Šušić & Dordević, 2011). Cultural events have both pecuniary and non-pecuniary benefits as they create a product that sells but also invigorates the image of a host destination's authentic culture (Okech, 2011; Raj & Vignali, 2010). They thus enhance a sense of material and community well-being and engender emotional satisfaction in all participants (Kim et al., 2013).

In the context of tourism, emotional satisfaction refers to a state of complacency derived from a positive match between pre-travel expectations and actual experiences (Antón et al., 2017). Cultural events also reflect a tourist destination's identity both externally and internally (Apleni & Henama, 2020). However, as is the case with numerous forms of tourism activities, cultural events exert their impact differently across participants and communities (Fredline & Faulkner, 2001), and there is therefore a direct relationship between the magnitude of a cultural event and its resultant impact. This means that the bigger the event, the higher the potential benefits or costs that it derives, and vice versa (Janeczko et al., 2002). On this basis, it is important that cost-benefit analysis research be conducted by the marketing team of a tourist destination prior to hosting the event in order to maximize the benefits and minimize costs (Andersson & Lundberg, 2013). There should also be a strong interconnectedness between visitors' satisfaction and that of the host destination during and after a cultural event, particularly as local communities' holistic well-being could sometimes be threatened by visitors' behaviour (Ivlevs, 2017; Séraphin et al., 2018). However, despite the potential for negative relationships, researchers and policy makers tend to focus on visitor satisfaction rather than on the satisfaction levels experienced by the host community (Uysal et al., 2016). Against this background, Séraphin et al. (2018) perceive an urgent need for empirical research on the contribution of tourism towards the holistic well-being of all key players, arguing that a feeling

of satisfaction will result in sustainable relationships among all key players in the planning and execution of events, and particularly as a driver of revisits and recommendations. In consideration of this proposition, this article evaluates the role of Umkhosi weLembe in sustaining relationships among key players in tourism in the KwaDukuza Local Municipality.

Theoretical background
Strategic management theory

Strategic management (SM) generally refers to a process of formulating and implementing organizational strategies for accomplishing and fulfilling an organization's mission (Welge et al., 2017), which is what drives its normative and operational management systems (Graf, 1999). A management system in the tourism context is guided by objectives, norms, origins, and principles that underpin the value system that is upheld by stakeholders such as event organizers, local destinations' marketing agents (DMOs), local governments and residents, and domestic and foreign visitors. Stakeholders, also referred to as 'key players', are "all parties or actors that can affect or be affected by their positive achievement of, or failure to achieve, specific objectives set for a cultural event endeavour" (Garvare & Johansson, 2010: 738). Reid and Arcodia (2002) argue that there are two categories of stakeholders: those who affect the development of cultural events, and those who are affected by these events. All stakeholders thus play different roles, possess different capabilities, and have different constructive aims and motives when they become involved in cultural event activities (Byrd, 2007). Cooperation and communication among stakeholders is considered essential for the long-term sustainability of cultural events (Chirieleison & Montrone, 2013; Engström & Håkansson, 2010), particularly as partnerships among stakeholders ensure high occupancy rates in hospitality businesses, job opportunities, infrastructural development, opportunities for local entrepreneurs regardless of low or high seasonality and economies of scale, and increased safety measures for visitors (d'Angella & Go, 2009; Burns & Howard, 2003). Conversely, as disputes among stakeholders may erupt due to diverse aims and motives, it is important that stakeholders' aims, motivation, and perceptions are in harmony with those of others (Zhou & Ap, 2009). Moreover, normative input and strategic management are required for event tourism sustainability as they involve order, sound processes, cooperation, and good performance that are in line with an organization's vision and mission (Bergmann & Bungert, 2013). It is therefore important that stakeholders' goals, aspirations, and opinions are shared, understood, and considered during the planning phase of a cultural event to ensure balance and to gain holistic support (Zhou & Ap, 2009). It is equally important that proper coordination of the roles of all key stakeholders in cultural event tourism is achieved and that event organizers, event management companies, and event industry suppliers work collaboratively (Allen et al., 2000). According to Bowdin et al. (2001), cultural event tourism is when tourists travel outside their places of residence with the aim of cherishing, celebrating, or commemorating carefully planned culturally oriented occasions or events that exhibit the character and importance of a particular group of people, a community, a society, a place, a locality, or a nation. The authors argue that SM was a pivotal theoretical foundation upon which the key notion of *building sustainable relationships among key players through cultural events* was predicated. SM underpinned the evaluation of the data to either corroborate or dispute the findings. It also illuminated the conclusions that were reached based on the results that emerged from the thematic analysis of the participants' perceptions of the studied phenomenon.

Literature review

Cultural events and tourism development

Numerous tourism enterprises regularly or occasionally stage cultural events as a drawcard for the flow of tourists, tourism promotion, and socio-economic and socio-cultural advancement (Nkosi, 2019; Zlatanov, 2015; Felsenstein & Fleischer, 2003; O'Sullivan & Jackson, 2002). According to ŠuŠić and Dordević (2011) and Getz (2008), cultural events fall typologically under the category of major events as they are attended by a considerable number of visitors, enjoy wide media coverage, and have an impact on the socio-economic and socio-cultural development of a host destination. From a cultural event perspective, tourist audiences "create new forms of demand, sources of income, and means of heightening repute", while such events also "create product [and an] invigorate image and enable a glimpse into a host destination's authentic culture" (Okech, 2011: 195).

The staging of cultural events thus requires systemic planning, development, and marketing to enhance their image and serve as a catalyst for infrastructural and economic growth (Lu et al., 2020; Getz & Page, 2016). Historical and cultural themes are used by host destinations as a foundation upon which cultural events are designed to attract tourists and create a sustainable cultural image (Blešić et al., 2014). Moreover, similar to any other form of special-interest travel, cultural event tourism can be viewed from both the supply and demand sides. According to Getz (2008), the supply side deals with the development and promotion of cultural events to attract tourists, promote a positive destination image, and advance marketing, while the demand side focuses mainly on the target market and strategies through which the demands of potential clientele may be met.

Socio-economic and socio-cultural impact of cultural events

A cultural event may impact the host community and attending tourists either positively or negatively (Nicolaides, 2017; Hall, 1997). According to Lill (2015) and Kim and Petrick (2005), many of these events attract both domestic and foreign visitors who may stay longer when their demands are met, and they therefore spend a lot of money in the vicinity of the tourist attraction. Other positive spinoffs are increased job opportunities, leakages, and infrastructural development (Gursoy et al., 2004; Chalip & Layns, 2002). Cultural event tourism often induces refurbishment of public facilities (e.g., sidewalks, parking lots, and public restrooms) and result in improved service delivery (e.g., upgraded water and sanitation provision, better amenities, and good infrastructure), all of which benefit both the local residents and visitors (Kreag, 2001). Moreover, publicity in print and in the electronic media also raises awareness of a host destination and may lure potential visitors and encourage current visitors to revisit the site or to recommend it to family and friends (Oshimi & Harada, 2016; Jayaswal, 2009). Al-Dweik (2020) and Zhang et al. (2014) agree, arguing that the better the destination is perceived by experienced and potential visitors, the greater is the probability of it being considered for revisits or recommendation to others.

It is undeniable that image plays a crucial role in visitors' decision to visit a destination as well as their subsequent travel behaviour (Zhang et al., 2014). This means that sustaining a host destination's image remains the key principle upon which the success of a cultural event hinges (Quinn, 2006). However, in the case of an unsuccessful cultural event, negative media coverage may adversely impact a host destination's overall image, and this may reduce future visits or recommendations to others (Chalip et al., 2003). Besides, although cultural events are hosted to enhance potential job creation and ensure increased revenue, some disadvantages are imposed on local communities and visitors. For example, the cost of living in the area may increase due to inflated prices as demand increases (Andereck et al., 2005). Factors such as infrastructural breakdown, solid waste disposal challenges, and other forms of environmental

pollution may also be experienced (Etiosa, 2012). Moreover, employment opportunities associated with cultural events are typically seasonal, short-term, and low-paying, and under-employment or unemployment may be rife during off-seasons (Kreag, 2001). Other challenges may be experienced due to changes in a value system, norms, beliefs, perceptions, morals, and behaviour, and these may negatively impact the quality of life of local residents and visitors (Viviers & Slabbert, 2012; International Association for Impact Assessment [IAIA], 2003). For instance, excessive tourist turnout may disrupt local residents' normal lifestyle, impinge on their privacy, and impact their overall well-being (Séraphin et al., 2018; Fredline & Deerey, 2005). The influx of large crowds of tourists is also associated with traffic congestion, misconduct, and infrastructural degradation (Gursoy et al., 2004). It may also stimulate antisocial practices such as commercial sex, crime against tourists, and substance abuse and may trigger conflict between local residents and visitors as a result of their cultural differences (Page, 2009; Viviers & Slabbert, 2012). Moreover, all these factors may impact the authenticity of a cultural event as the local ethnic culture may be altered to satisfy visitors' demands (Kreag, 2001). Conversely, cultural events enhance a nation's pride and identity (both internally and externally), forge social cohesion, and create awareness of the host community and what it has to offer (Richards & Wilson, 2004; Gursoy et al., 2004), which Maenning and du Plessis (2009: 62) refer to as the "feel-good factor". Generally, residents and visitors build rapport and share stories and experiences during their encounters at cultural events (Quinn, 2009; Elias-Varotsis, 2006). According to Delamere (2001), such events facilitate acknowledgement of local residents' positive contributions and expose visitors to a rich variety of cultural experiences.

Key players in cultural events

As the tenets of SM require proper planning, sound implementation, and effective management, it plays a fundamental role in accomplishing the anticipated outcomes of cultural events. Various key players are involved in the planning, management, and promotion of cultural events, and a holistic and participatory developmental approach is therefore pivotal for the success and sustainability of tourism destinations and the cultural event/s they offer (Gumede & Nzama, 2021). Although their contribution is often underplayed, local communities are key players in the success of cultural events, while tourists are the intended target audience (Etiosa, 2012). Getz (1997: 46) argues that "host-guest interaction can either be improved through joint participation in cultural events or strained by events and tourism in general". In this sense, a pro-social cohesion doctrine remains key in achieving cultural events' intended goals. We therefore explored the concept of 'social cohesion' as it is largely ill-defined in the literature (Mekoa & Busari, 2018; Chan et al., 2006). As different societies reside within diverse geographies and have diverse political representatives, they are characterized by distinct socio-economic and socio-cultural challenges (Bruhn, 2009). In this context, Pervaiz et al. (2013: 5) describe social cohesion as "a phenomenon of togetherness which serves to maintain unity and harmony within societies". Dragolov et al. (2013: 8) also define it as "the manifestation of [an] intact society [that is] marked by solidarity, helpfulness, and team spirit", and thus the ability to tolerate and respect individuals' feelings and opinions as well as diverse tribes, races, cultures, and religions. In essence, the prevention of cultural dominance remains a key feature of social cohesion (Green et al., 2009). Accordingly, social cohesion is crucial in the quest for sustainable development, especially in developing countries where fatal incidents associated with socio-cultural and socio-political intolerance remain prevalent (Burns et al., 2018).

The nature and extent of social and cultural differences between host community members and tourists and the ratio of tourists to the members of the host community are among the primary factors that trigger conflict between host communities and tourists (Page, 2009). It is therefore important that the specific needs of all stakeholders are considered in the planning,

organization, and hosting of cultural events. Etiosa (2012: 29) iterates that "there are always lots of positive and negative impacts of events on a host community and tourists", and event organizers should thus ensure that positive impacts are always ensured. This can be achieved by advanced identification, realistic prediction, and sound management of any such perceived impacts (Allen et al., 2000) and by conducting feasibility studies on tourists' preferences, comfort, and safety (Etiosa, 2012). Essentially, cultural events should be managed and organized in a manner that stimulates emotional connectedness and that engenders memorable experiences for local communities and tourists alike (Hemmerling, 1997).

Case description
Umkhosi weLembe as a cultural event and tourism product

The cultural event known as 'Umkhosi weLembe' was first launched in 1953 with the official unveiling of the memorial monument of King Shaka (former King of the Zulu Kingdom) by the late King Cyprian kaDinizulu (Buverud, 2007). The event is held annually in KwaDukuza Local Municipality on 24 September. KwaDukuza was the homestead of King Shaka, whose brilliant military tactics resulted in the consolidation of many small Nguni clans into a mighty Zulu Kingdom (Biyela, 2013). King Shaka was born circa 1787 and died in 1828 (Brooks, 1992). He was the illegitimate son of Nandi, an Elangeni clan princess, and a Zulu clan prince named Senzangakhona. As Shaka was born out of wedlock, he and his mother were banished by King Senzangakhona himself and they migrated to Elangeni where Shaka was constantly bullied by others. Later on, Shaka and his mother lodged with King Dingiswayo of the Mthethwa clan where he proved himself a brave warrior. Due to his bravery, he earned King Dingiswayo's respect; so much so that when King Senzangakhona died, Shaka ascended the Zulu throne (Wyle, 2000). Shaka's troops conquered large parts of the eastern part of Southern Africa, causing many tribes to flee as far north as Tanzania (Wyle, 2000). As a result, he was nicknamed *iLembe eleqa amanye amaLembe* (a king that conquers other kings). Shaka had a brave and submissive servant called Jeqe, the son of Sikhunyana of the Buthelezi clan, who attended to his personal needs. After his coronation, Shaka built his homestead between the Umdloti and Nonoti rivers in the Madundube Hills to the west and the Indian Ocean to the east and named it *KwaDukuza* (Dube, 1951).

The death of King Shaka in 1828 was the result of a plot that had been hatched by his half-brothers, Dingani and Mhlangane, his chief Induna, Mbopha, and his paternal aunt, Mkabayi (Wyle, 2000). His reign lasted just twelve years and he died at the young age of 41 (Wyle, 2000). He was buried at KwaDukuza. Due to its rich history and as the former homestead of King Shaka, KwaDukuza's economy has the potential to grow, and the Umkhosi weLembe event may be the catalyst that sets this process in motion. Due to the global outbreak of Covid-19 in 2020, Umkhosi weLembe was held virtually on 24 September 2020, which marked its 67th anniversary. Park et al. (2021) and Andersson et al. (2020) acknowledge that the South African event sector ground to a halt in March 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the resultant precautionary measures that had to be adhered to. This was devastating for cultural events that usually attracted large crowds of people.

In 2020, only a few people were invited to the event at the Enyokeni Royal Palace in KwaNongoma. The event was celebrated here instead of at KwaDukuza due to the stringent restrictions during the pandemic. The late King Zwelithini Goodwill KaBhekizulu, the great-great grandnephew of King Shaka, delivered the keynote address and led the singing of the traditional hymn, *Amahubo*. The main focus of his keynote address was the significance of the event, although he also addressed gender-based violence due to its prevalence in the country (Matiwane, 2020).

Umkhosi weLembe is one of many celebrations that foster unity and pride among the Zulu people, and it draws people from all over South Africa and abroad (Buthelezi, 2017). The event is open to everyone, young and old. On the day of the event, the Royal Poet (or praise singer) praises the King, which is followed by speeches presented by distinguished guests and international visitors. Later, the current Zulu monarch delivers a keynote address which is followed by chanting and traditional songs. The songs are calm and dignified and most carry celebratory messages about former kings. Once the event has come to an end, a traditional feast is served and enjoyed by all attendees (Mthembu, 2020).

Contextual setting

The study from which this paper emanated was conducted in KwaDukuza Local Municipality (KDLM) in 2021. KDLM is a category B municipality and falls under the iLembe District in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The key feature of KDLM is the N2 Development Corridor that runs across its length (KDLM, 2020/2021). The geographical position of the study site is shown in Figure 1 below.
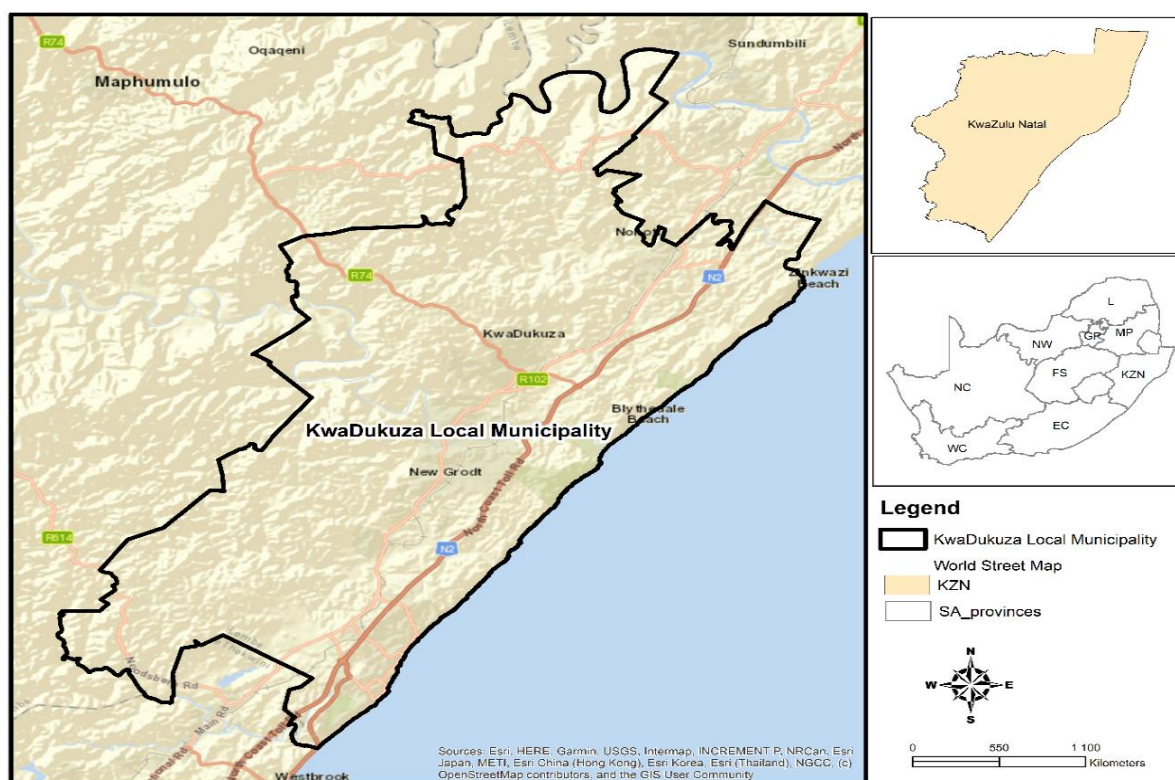

Figure 1. Geographical position of the study area. Source: Researchers' construct

Materials and methods

This article examines the views of key players involved in the Umkhosi weLembe cultural event. The interpretivism paradigm was adopted as it allowed the researchers to engage in a subjective interpretation of human participants' perceptions of the world as a fundamental basis for understanding the social phenomenon under study, as proposed by Kelliher (2005). An inductive approach was adopted using semi-structured in-depth interviews as proposed by Bradley et al. (2007) to elicit the participants' authentic views regarding Umkhosi weLembe's role in building and sustaining relationships between the local community and tourists. Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) argue that in-depth interviews elicit rich and thick descriptions that enable researchers to probe for additional information. Maree and Pietersen (2016)

acknowledge that human behaviour is socially constructed and prompted by a particular phenomenon, and they therefore argue that behaviour is best understood when subjects are subjectively studied within their social context. An interview guide was used to collect data from 150 participants through face-to-face interviews. This interview form was chosen based on its potential for gathering in-depth information and because it allowed the researchers effective control of the sample (Kothari, 2004).

Table 1. Distribution of participants and total sample

Participants	Number
Event organizers	*n4*
KDLM's Tourism and LED Officers	*n2*
Community leaders	*n10*
Local residents	*n76*
Domestic tourists	*n42*
International tourists	*n16*
Total sample	*n150*

Source: Research data

The participant sample comprised event organizers, municipality (tourism officer and local economic development [LED] officer) officers, community leaders, local residents, and domestic and international tourists. Omona (2013: 170) argues that "sampling should be a consideration in all qualitative enquiries, regardless of purpose of research". In accord, event organizers and municipality officers were purposefully sampled based on their potential knowledge and the information they could supply regarding the phenomenon under study. The purposive sampling technique was also chosen as specific participants were identified and recruited based on their appropriateness as information-rich cases and in the interest of the most effective use of resources (Patton, 2002). As proposed by Etikan et al. (2016), community leaders and domestic and international tourists were conveniently sampled and recruited based on their accessibility, geographical proximity, willingness to participate, and potential knowledge of the issues that related to the studied phenomenon.

The sampling procedure was completed when saturation had been reached, which was when no new information would emerge from further investigation (Creswell, 2014; Smith, 2010). Trustworthiness was achieved as the participants voluntarily shared their views on how the Umkhosi weLembe event forged and sustained relationships. All the participants' responses were recorded and transcribed verbatim for scrabbing, coding, verification, and data analysis. The responses were transcribed and translated from isiZulu into English where appropriate (Sutton & Auston, 2015). As recommended by Clarke and Braun (2017), the responses were thematically analyzed using codes to identify common threads and shared meanings which resulted in themes that illuminated the phenomenon under study.

Results and discussion

Etiosa (2012) argues that, although cultural events will advance a tourism destination's socio-economic and socio-cultural status and branding, it has the potential to impact these dynamics adversely if not properly planned, organized, and managed. In addition, qualitative research should facilitate interpretation of participants' experiences and enhance understanding thereof (Cavana et al., 2001; Jackson, 1995). Against this backdrop, data about the participants' experiences of the Umkhosi weLembe event were obtained and analysed. The findings are presented under broad themes.

Collective participation engenders success

The following comments highlight this theme:

"The increased interest by domestic and international visitors in the event reflects the significance of inclusive and collective participation of all stakeholders, including local residents in planning, organizing, and managing the event" (Event Organizer, KDLM, September 2021).

"It is important that events that are meant to commemorate prominent figures such as King Shaka and others, are spearheaded by individuals who are mindful of the fact that these events belong to everyone within the Zulu nation, and therefore we all deserve to participate, especially during the planning phase of the event" (Community leader, KDLM, September 2021).

The sentiments expressed above are shared by various authors (see Gumede & Nzama, 2019, 2020; Thondhlana & Cundill, 2017; Wang et al., 2015; Vaidya & Mayer, 2014; Simon & Etienne, 2009; Garrod, 2003), who all argue that the participatory approach is a fundamental component of successful and sustainable development projects, particularly in tourism. Moreover, cooperation and communication amongst cultural event stakeholders are essential in ensuring visitors' positive perceptions of an event (Engström & Håkansson, 2010; Håkansson & Snehota, 2006). Positive derivatives from cooperative planning and management of cultural events include economies of scale, synergy, lowering the negative impact caused by seasonality, achieving high occupancy rates and increased job opportunities, ensuring improved infrastructure, and establishing effective safety measures (d'Angella & Go, 2009; Burns & Howard, 2003). Various scholars (see Welge et al., 2017; Bergmann & Bungert, 2013; Graf, 1999) argue that SM facilitates a strategic approach that ensures that all necessary prerequisites are met to achieve organizational goals, which is a principle that holds true for cultural events as well.

Satisfactory service delivery yields positive socio-economic and socio-cultural outcomes

Various authors (see Lill, 2015; Kim & Petrick, 2005; Gursoy et al., 2004; Chalip & Layns, 2002; Kreag, 2001) affirm that cultural events attract visitors who will most likely stay longer and spend more than usual if services are satisfactory. It was on this literary basis that the interview participants were recruited to elicit their views on the benefits of Umkhosi weLembe. The following opinions were expressed and are presented verbatim after translation:

"Overall service in terms of infrastructure and offerings are the main attributes of the satisfactory experience that my family and I have had during the event" (Domestic tourist, KDLM, September 2021).

"Apart from satisfactory roads and facilities' condition, we are impressed with the uniqueness and authenticity of the cultural displays. We are willing to spend a few more days as we expect to have other impressive encounters within the municipality…" (International tourist, KDLM, September 2021).

"For me as a local resident and an entrepreneur, the event creates an opportunity for meeting and sharing ideas with people from multicultural backgrounds and for exhibiting and selling more antiques to local and international visitors. Due to its magnitude and increased demand, I have expanded my business and employed more local people, especially youths, to sell my products during and after the event" (Local resident, KDLM, September 2021).

In corroboration of the views expressed above, Lill (2015) confirms that cultural events can impact host destinations positively in a variety of ways if services are satisfactory. A satisfactory service in tourism refers to tourists' overall sense of being impressed due to remarkable experiences while visiting a tourist destination (Chen et al., 2016; Altunel & Erkut, 2015). In a nutshell, tourists experience satisfaction if their pre-travel expectations are met by their actual experiences that are shaped by first-hand encounters with visible, invisible, palpable, and impalpable offerings at their tourist destination of choice (Altunel & Erkut, 2015). Cultural events generate benefits that are either pecuniary or non-pecuniary. Gursoy et al. (2004) identify increased job opportunities, leakages, purchases, and fees as pecuniary benefits, while infrastructural development, multicultural awareness, improved service delivery, and improved host-guest relationships are viewed as the non-pecuniary benefits that are derived from cultural events. In this context, Tassiopoulos (2005) affirms that events that are either hosted locally or regionally have the potential to keep domestic markets active.

Cultural events evoke a sense of national pride and signify ethnic identity

Various scholars (see Masilela et al., 2023; Alananzeh, 2022; Nkosi, 2019; Žilič-Fišer & Kožuh, 2018; Tassiopoulos & Nicolaides, 2017) allude to the interconnectedness of cultural events, a sense of national pride, and ethnic identity. These factors were corroborated by the interviewees who celebrated the significance of Umkhosi weLembe in their lives. Their comments exposed a common thread between earlier and current research findings on the topic in question. Some cryptic comments were expressed in language such as the following:

"…suddenly something to take pride in, especially as the municipality and the province are…national, but also international…" (KDLM's Tourism Officer, September 2021).

"I developed a certain special sensitivity for almost everything associated with the municipality and the province…an event of such a calibre translates into a proud moment" (Domestic tourist, KDLM, September 2021).

"The event evokes a sense of pride…we are grateful and proud of being descendants of such a remarkable kingdom [as we are] commemorating our great king" (Community leader, KDLM, September 2021).

"It signifies our ethnic identity as a Zulu nation" (KDLM's LED Officer, September 2021).

The findings confirm that cultural events arouse a sense of belonging and pride while serving as a symbol of ethnic identity. Earlier studies also highlight cultural events as a mechanism that fosters a sense of belonging, national pride, and identity among members of a particular community or nation. Mokoena (2020) affirms that people who belong to the Zulu ethnic group and those who aspire to engage with its cultural experiences connect emotionally with their cultural heritage when they encounter authentic experiences that are endemic to the Zulu nation. According to Okech (2011), cultural events allow a glimpse of a host destination's authentic culture.

Positive perceptions stimulate tourist turnout and loyalty

Many interviewees acknowledged that the impacts of Umkhosi weLembe were wider than just pecuniary. Garcia (2003) and Manzo and Perkins (2006) acknowledge that, while communities are generally geographically defined, people's attachment to a place and their sense of community are interwoven. In this study, we considered the perceptions of both domestic and

international tourists, and this allowed us to ascertain the extent to which KwaDukuza was perceived as either positive or negative by a wide range of tourists during and after the Umkhosi weLembe event. Based on thematic analysis, the findings highlight both cognitive and affective responses to the Umkhosi weLembe event and its setting as a basis for tourists' turnout and repeated participation in it. The following comments were pertinent to this objective:

"The physical infrastructure, uniqueness of the cultural displays, the ambience, and the hospitability of the local residents toward us… are the main reasons that inculcate a fear of missing out on the event; hence, this is my second time being part of it" (International tourist, KDLM, September 2021).

"My experience of the event has changed my negative perception [fear of attending the event] as we have had remarkable experiences…Due to my emotional attachment to the event and KwaDukuza, I shall not want to miss out on the next one" (Domestic tourist, KDLM, September 2021).

Destination image is a multidimensional phenomenon that is influenced by numerous factors that are perceived either positively or negatively by tourists (Gumede & Ezeuduji, 2021; Picazo & Moreno-Gil, 2019), and therefore creating and sustaining a positive destination image are imperative if the success of a cultural event as a tourist attraction is to be achieved (Quinn, 2006). The current study found that satisfactory experiences elicited positive remarks that would be shared with family and friends who would then be motivated to share the experience (Chen et al., 2016; Zhang et al., 2014; Light et al., 2012; de Chernatony & Harris, 2010; Allen et al., 2000). Conversely, a negative experience may stain a destination's image as a result of visitors' cognitive perceptions (e.g., poor infrastructural development), distinctive perceptions (e.g., socio-cultural characteristics) and affective perceptions (e.g., staff and local residents' lack of hospitality towards visitors) (Etiosa, 2012). In light of the above, event organizers need to constantly evaluate all prospective, first-time, and repeat visitors' perceptions with the intention of identifying strengths and weaknesses, predicting visitors' behavioural intentions, and acquiring information that can be resourceful for the future management of a cultural event (Lee, 2009; Getz, 1997).

Cultural events raise multicultural awareness and sustain relationships
Either intentionally or by default, cultural events may serve as a channel through which local residents and visitors exchange ideas and share cultural experiences, values, norms, and beliefs. If these exchanges occur, it will strengthen the relationship between the two parties (Arcodia & Whitfield, 2006). However, Cook et al. (2010) argue that a cultural event may distort a host destination's cultural value and purpose due to visitors' or outsiders' cultural influence. Page (2009) also maintains that cultural events could be a source of conflict between visitors and local residents if local residents show animosity towards visitors or if the cultural differences between them are very wide and conflicting. This may possibly ruin the desired outcome of an event and impact adversely on the destination's image. Against this backdrop, it was evident that the manner in which Umkhosi weLembe was managed and presented impacted positively on the socio-cultural well-being of local residents and visitors alike. The following excerpt testifies to this statement:

"Although we may be diverse in terms of religion, politics, and other socio-economic and socio-cultural dynamics, the event brings together and unites people from different backgrounds. As a result, one gets a chance to socialize with people from other parts of the world and we have an opportunity to share our cultural experiences. In this process, we

establish sustainable friendships and relationships. For example, one of my colleagues is married to a man that she met during the event" (Local resident, KDLM, September 2021).

The findings emphasise an overall positive response to Umkhosi weLembe as the interviewees perceived the event as a platform from which multicultural exchanges occurred. They were able to share their beliefs and respected the similarities and differences that were visible among the many participants and spectators. Correspondingly, Lee et al. (2014) and Engström and Håkansson (2010) attribute cultural awareness and the sustainable friendships that are forged to good communication among key players who participate in cultural events.

Conclusion

This article evaluated the role of Umkhosi weLembe in sustaining relationships among key players in this event that is held annually in the KwaDukuza Local Municipality. The rich and credible data were obtained from both participants and visitors. We conclude that the evident success of the Umkhosi weLembe event is predicated upon the SM theoretical perspective that posits that, as far as this cultural event is concerned, meeting the necessary prerequisites and achieving its anticipated outcomes require a strategic approach. Ensuring tourists' satisfaction should be a key consideration during strategic planning to sustain present and future tourist turnout at this and similar cultural events. Thematic analysis revealed five different dimensions to explain the participants' experiences of Umkhosi weLembe: (1) The event is viewed as a 'pro-participatory' approach as its success hinges upon key players' dedication, cooperation, and commitment. Key players had evidently been working collectively and cooperatively towards achieving the event's aims and objectives as the participants experienced no negative encounters. (2) The participants' narratives depicted the key players in a positive light as they commended the socio-economic and socio-cultural advancements in the vicinity of the host community and were satisfied with service provisioning. (3) Sentiments similar to those expressed by the participants are shared in the literature, particularly regarding the effectiveness of cultural events in evoking a sense of national pride while also eliciting a sense of pride in ethnic identity, as was experienced by visitors who attended the Umkhosi weLembe event. (4) Tourist attachment that can be attributed to positive experiences at the host destination stimulates tourist loyalty. This finding suggests that frequent evaluation of visitors' perceptions of a destination is fundamental in ensuring effective management and the sustainable development of cultural events. (5) Cultural events may be utilized as a platform for raising multicultural awareness and for forging and sustaining relationships among key players. Our overall conclusion, which is based on our considered merging of the theoretical background, literary perspectives, and the findings elicited from thematic analysis, is that strategic organization and the effective management of cultural events that are hosted at tourist destinations are prerequisites for forging and sustaining positive relationships between local residents, who are proud of their destination's image, and visitors, who demand satisfactory experiences. Only when their demands are met will tourists pay a next visit or recommend a particular tourist destination to others.

Limitations

The study was limited in scope to one municipal area and relatively few participants, therefore the findings may not be generalized to all South African municipalities that host cultural events for tourism advancement. Based on the participants' views and our observations during the sampling phase, elderly people were reluctant to participate in the study as they were wary of Covid-19 health implications and restrictions. Moreover, non-probability sampling did not allow every element in the population an equal chance of being selected for participation in the

study. Another limitation was that the study focused on one cultural event only, whereas numerous cultural events are hosted in the country that may also contribute toward sustainable relationships among local residents, visitors, and other key players who are involved in such events.

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