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# Contributions of Local Festivals in the Context of Sustainable Tourism



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#### **Article History**

## Abstract

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#### Keywords

Sustainability Festival Local festival Contributions of festivals The study was prepared with document analysis technique, which is one of the qualitative research methods in order to evaluate the contribution of local festivals within the framework of sustainable tourism. This is intended, about the topic books, articles, magazines, statistics, reports, newspapers, news examined and evaluated. Local festivals, sustainability, and the effects of local festivals were discussed utilizing secondary data sources and a general assessment of the sustainability and contributions of local festivals was made using the obtained information. According to the information obtained, the festivals affect the region where they take place economic, social and cultural positive or negative. However, in festivals where commercial concerns are pursued, it is seen that positive economic effects are prioritized and negative effects are ignored. In this context, suggestions for sustainability and increasing positive contributions of local festivals have been made in the study.

#### Article Type

Research Article

## INTRODUCTION

Over the centuries, many events such as exhibitions, fairs, and festivals with business, sporting, and cultural content have been organized (Mair & Whitford, 2013). Among these events, both international and national, regional and local festivals attract attention. The well-attended festivals benefit the communities in which they take place in many ways. For this reason, towns, villages, and cities share their culture, environment, and spending opportunities with visitors by promoting festivals every day (O'Sullivan & Jackson, 2002). Local festivals have an economic saving feature for rural areas. These activities also improve domestic tourism mobilization. Local festivals provide many contributions to the public not only economically but also socially and psychologically (Gözgeç Mutlu, Avcıkurt & Filiz, 2020).

The word "festival" is derived from the Latin word "festivus", taken from Anglo-Norman French (Srikanth & Ram, 2013). From a cultural and anthropological point of view, festivals are sacred and/or religious celebrations. There are various expressions in this sense in the literature (Choi, Kang & Kim, 2021). Festivals are a kind of themed special events with a formal program, open to the public, rooted in history, anthropology, or natural aspects (Getz & Page, 2016), that provide participants with celebration and enjoyment feelings (Ma & Lew, 2012). Festivals, which provide people with the opportunity to get away from daily life and experience different places (Cheng, Liu & Bi, 2021), are both the result and the presenters of the cultural identity of the places they take place in, if they are considered traditionally (Varotsis, 2006). Festivals cover social cohesion, culture, religion, locality, food and drink, music, art, and regional and experiential themes (Maeng, Jang & Li, 2016). Historically, the way festivals celebrate special occasions has been through art, ritual, and festivity. Furthermore, festivals are viewed as social gatherings that objectify people's collective hopes and dreams while also providing a vital opportunity for a unique experience in their social lives (Earls, 1993 as cited in Arcodia & Whitford, 2006). Festivals often benefit from a community's cultural identity and contribute to defining its sense of place. They also stimulate the fixed historical architecture and nature of a place. In this sense, festivals are often related to the built and preserved history of the places where they take place. Therefore, attending or being interested in a festival is an experience that distances people from everyday life and also offers socio-cultural and personal opportunities, compared to a non-festive event (Ma & Lew, 2012).

Festivals as tourist attractions are always used to bring tourists to destinations. In addition, there is a relationship between the growth of festivals and the increase in touristic demand. In current usage, the concept of festival tourism is similar to the term well-developed event tourism. When festivals are used in this sense, they refer to consciously created marketing tools by considering city branding/place positioning/destinations (Quinn, 2006). Also, destinations frequently employ festivals as a marketing tool as well as a way to increase tourist satisfaction and loyalty (Cheng, Liu & Bi, 2021). For this reason, cities with rich historical heritage are trying to expand the cultural attractions they offer day by day by entering the field of cultural entertainment and festivals to improve the region's image and appeal to a wider section of tourists (Herrero et al., 2012). Festivals have become a significant tool for economic development both through tourism and the redesign and rebranding of cities and regions as modern cultural hubs (Ma & Lew, 2012). Therefore, they contribute to the economy, the city's cultural productive fabric, and the income circulation among the various relevant economic stakeholders (Del Barrio, Devesa, & Herrero, 2012). However, festivals' indicated benefits have been questioned and their effects on sustainability have been attempted to understand due to concerns about the negative consequences of tourism, which is believed to be a significant value

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in income-generating aspects, employment generation, and economic development (O'Sullivan & Jackson, 2002). It is thought that there is a positive symbiosis between festival tourism and sustainable development (O'Sullivan & Jackson, 2002). Sustainability has rarely been investigated in the festival literature. Until the early 2000s, researchers paid little attention to whether festivals could provide an effective tool for sustainable tourism (Quinn, 2006). Therefore, it is crucial to focus on the relationship between festivals and sustainable tourism.

Local festivals contribute to the social, political, cultural, and economic environments with a liveliness and tourism activity to the rural areas where they are organized. Local events, which provide key opportunities for extending tourism activities over a 12-month period and diversifying touristic products, also help the region promote itself, create an image, and increase its tourism share (Baysal, Özgüre & Çeken, 2016). Achieving these stated benefits can only be possible with sustainability. Festivals that are organized or implemented without a clear understanding of sustainability cannot fully present the aforementioned contributions.

Festival tourism, with its focus on community development and local environments, is one of the most sustainable forms of tourism development, as it requires a balanced approach by nature (O'Sullivan & Jackson, 2002). It is important to evaluate the relationship between local festivals and sustainable tourism development in terms of participants, organizers, and local people because this allows festivals to make social, cultural, physical, and economic contributions at the maximum level. The highest benefit of local festivals to the place where they are held can be achieved with the understanding of sustainability and various strategies. In this study, the contribution of local festivals within the framework of sustainable tourism is discussed. It is aimed to make a general evaluation with the information obtained.

#### Methodology

Local festivals, sustainability, and the effects of local festivals were discussed in this research utilizing and a general assessment of the sustainability and contributions of local festivals was made using the obtained information. In this research, which aims to evaluate the contributions of local festivals within the scope of sustainable tourism, a qualitative research method based on document analysis was used. Document analysis have been an important element in qualitative research.

Especially in recent years, there has been an increase in the number of researchand articles that mention document analysis as part of the methodology (Kıral, 2020). In the study, first of all, a conceptual framework was created on local festivals, the sustainability of local festivals and their contributions. In the research, written and visual documents consisting of newspapers, magazines, books, statistics, articles and internet resources related to local festivals were used as data collection tools. Key words that integrate with the subject and summarize the main lines of the subject very well have been chosen (Kozak, 2015). In line with the data obtained from secondary data sources, the sustainability and contributions of local festivals to the region were evaluated. The information obtained is given in the findings section.

## Findings

In this section, first of all, information about local festivals and their sustainability will be given. In addition, the findings about the positive and negative effects of the festivals on the region will be presented.

#### Local Festivals and Sustainability

Ma and Lew (2012) define festivals and festival tourism in four separate contexts that arise from historical (or temporal) and geographical (or spatial) situations of special events. These are local heritage festivals, local modern festivals, national heritage festivals, and global modern festivals. All these festivals are strongly based on tradition and place. Local festivals are created from regional characteristics and various historical, cultural, and artistic resources to generate positive economic effects (Choi, Kang & Kim, 2021). Such celebrations contribute to local economic development. These festivals, especially organized on a regional scale, can be described as big markets. In addition to products' promotion in these markets, a financial income is provided through their sale. In this context, a local product has a beneficial impact on the public due to its economic and promotional worth (Göde & Yiğit, 2017).

Festivals are divided into local heritage festivals and local modern festivals. Local heritage festivals are defined as festivals that are shaped by the representation of local identity and authenticity, promoted and evaluated according to these issues. Local heritage festivals are highly likely to promote authenticity, as they are based on both geography and history. These celebrations carry symbolic meaning and significance related to the local sense of place and represent the classic definition of festivals. However, cultures are dynamic and constantly changing. At this point, local modern festivals come into play. Local modern festivals are festivals through which local communities continually create new ways to celebrate life. These events still add to the local identity, but there is more of a focus on entertainment rather than on authentic copies of traditions. These events are less serious but more fun than local heritage festivals (Ma & Lew, 2012). Therefore, local festivals are a complex cultural phenomenon and are not just an accumulation of cultural manifestations displayed there, but a cultural good in itself, a cultural expression, and a cultural process in which culture is consumed and reproduced (Del Barrio, Devesa & Herrero, 2012).

The concept of sustainability is reflected in almost all fields. It has emerged as a necessity of human life and the sustainability of many examples such as agriculture, cities, tourism, and technology has been exemplary in different fields. Although all of them are in different social dimensions, their common features are that they focus on the future of human beings and aim to protect the resources of the area for which they are considered (Beyhan & Ünügör, 2005).

Sustainable tourism is defined as the use of tourism resources without being consumed, polluted, destroyed, and used in a way that will enable them to be used by future generations. The World Tourism Organization defines sustainable tourism as providing the continuity of cultural integrity, basic ecological process, biological diversity, and life support systems while meeting the needs of existing tourists and the host region (Avcıkurt, 2009). The rationale for sustainable tourism development is based on the assurance of delivering renewable economic, social, and cultural benefits to society and the environment. Sustainability is an integral part of the ongoing social, cultural, environmental, and economic well-being of human communities. This situation applies equally to all areas of sustainable tourism. Tourism development cannot be expected to be sustainable without social sustainability (Richards & Hall, 2000). Economic development is considered as a balancing factor in terms of protecting environmental resources and providing social benefits for local people. In this direction, it is aimed that the benefits obtained today will continue in the future along with sustainable tourism policies and plans (Alkan, 2015). The pursuit of sustainable tourism imposes a number of obligations on integrating economic, social, and environmental issues into tourism planning and changing attitudes and traditions among different stakeholders to implement this (Kernel, 2005).

It is critical to conceptualize festival practices as socially sustainable tools and consider them in the context of sustainable tourism. The issue of sustainability is rarely investigated in the festival literature (Quinn, 2006). Sustainability is generally based on renewable social, economic, and cultural benefits that festivals offer to society. However, changing visitor characteristics and economic challenges straining households' disposable income are forcing organizers and marketers to rethink their strategies to ensure festivals' sustainability (Van Heerden & Saayman, 2018). Discussions about sustainable festivals generally take place on the issues such as the increase in festival supply, decrease in the number of visitors, and decline in sponsorships (Van Heerden & Saayman, 2018). Sustainability also has an impact on visitor satisfaction and preference. Sustainability perceptions of the visitors attending the festival are positively correlated with their satisfaction with the festival, and their intention to visit again (Ön Esen, Yüksel & Kılıç, 2020).

If festivals are to contribute to sustainable localities, they should expand their benefits to residents and businesses. However, promoting sustainable approaches to assure human communities' continued social, cultural, and economic well-being is still an unsolved problem (Okech, 2011). Moreover, the recent increase in excessive competition between local festivals poses a serious threat to the overall sustainability of festival tourism (Choi, Kang & Kim, 2021). The festival theme should be unique and original that competitors cannot imitate to obtain a sustainable competitive advantage. In this context, creativity is a critical element in attracting both new and previous participants. If a festival has a common theme, it should be enriched in terms of program content, quality of services, and location (Özdemir & Çulha, 2009). Furthermore, the increasing competitiveness among festivals and the need to preserve their viability in the future necessitate the identification of factors that not only attract and satisfy new participants but also retain former ones (Báez-Montenegro & Devesa-Fernández, 2017).

A successful and sustainable tourism strategy defines ways to welcome and include visitor satisfaction, ensure a profitable and prosperous industry, engage and benefit host communities, and conserve and enhance the local environment. In this context, an effective festival organization requires maximizing the benefits of society, stakeholders, and festival visitors. If the costs of a festival or a special event are to outweigh the benefits for all stakeholders, the organization should be reviewed because events that are not carefully planned and executed by the organizers might have detrimental effects on society (Duran, Hamarat & Özkul, 2014). The decrease in the festival's continuity, a transformation of positive social, cultural and economic effects into negative, the fall in the number of participants, the commercialization of culture, and the local people's indifference can all be given as instances of these outcomes.

#### **Impacts of Local Festivals**

Festivals, which make it possible to successfully host visitors and are the cultural resources of a region, are usually organized to form a positive image of a place and provide input into the local economy (Uysal, Gahan & Martin, 1993). Festivals attract more and more visitors every day. They offer visitors the opportunity to get away from their daily routine life. They also help preserve and enhance local culture in the communities where they are hosted. Furthermore, they provide economic benefits to communities, boost the local tourism industry and extend the tourism season (Huang, Li & Cai, 2010).

Although festivals differ in importance according to the socio-cultural environment, they are arguably a common denominator in terms of community celebrations. In addition to enabling a community to celebrate, festivals can

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provide opportunities for the host community, such as new infrastructure development and employment chances. While festivals have positive aspects, they can also have negative socio-cultural and economic consequences for the host community. Excessive commercialization, for example, can sabotage the development of the host destination's socio-cultural values and traditions. However, despite the potential for negative consequences on the socio-cultural environment, festivals' positive impacts on communities are much higher (Arcodia & Whitford, 2006). The consensus is that hosting a large event provides employment, significant financial benefits to the community, and strengthens the residents' economy (Diedering & Kwiatkowski, 2015). Festivals play an important role in rural communities and are often organized by sports, cultural, business, or other sorts of associations, and they can derive economic benefits from festivals (Hjalager & Kwiatkowski, 2018). The relevant literature shows that festivals are beneficial for both social development and tourism sustainability (Gunsoy & Hannam, 2013).

Festivals can help provide a higher quality of life and urban renewal locally, through increased tourism infrastructure and the construction or redevelopment of venues. However, physical qualities can be fragile in terms of the environment, and adverse effects such as environmental damage, noise, and overcrowding may occur, especially for the local population. These situations can be examples of festivals' effects on the physical environment. However, from a political point of view, festivals are seen as a tool that encourages alternative political ideology of subcultures for some administrators. Festivals are organized to attract attention and reach more people. In addition, governments encourage festivals due to their economic contributions to the regions (Arcodia & Whitford, 2006). One of the most important areas where festivals are effective is the socio-cultural environment. Festivals allow people to benefit from common history, cultural practices, and ideals, as well as provide local continuity in terms of fostering social interactions. Some festivals are a kind of tourist attractions that highlight the country's cultural values or historical assets (Özdemir & Çulha, 2009). They can improve a region's social environment, or conversely, have a negative impact on a society's social life and structure. Festivals, in which local people participate and cooperate, show more positive social developments (Arcodia & Whitford, 2006). They enable communities to reinterpret their cultural identities through the experiences and practices they describe, motivate and help promote (Varotsis, 2006).

Many studies have focused on festivals' economic effects. Festivals are celebrations that have the capacity to create varying degrees of positive economic impacts, including increased incomes and employment. However, in addition to their positive economic effects, festivals' negative economic consequences, such as inflated prices, evacuation of local people, and disruption of normal business flow have attracted the most attention among researchers to date (Arcodia & Whitford, 2006). Festivals' economic significance derives from the participants' expenditures, which filter the local economy and stimulate output. Since different types of tourists have different spending patterns, their spatial and regional-local development impacts may differ (Saayman & Saayman, 2006). Festivals are often seen as part of the economic development strategy of rural areas (Chhabra, Sills & Cubbage, 2003). During the event, local governments can boost the region's economic structure by improving their ability to market local goods and services. At the same time, this situation prevents too many purchases from outside and contributes to the use of local products as input (Tohmo, 2005). Since festivals offer the opportunity to contribute directly to the region, as long as they are planned correctly, they can provide such opportunities more easily, especially to women. Furthermore, festivals increase the interest in local products, tourist stays in the region, cultural development, and the local people's quality of life. Such activities can generate broader intangible benefits and costs in addition to easily identifiable financial impacts such as construction expenditures, additional trade and business

development, increased property values, long-term tourism promotion benefits, and resident migration (Dwyer et al., 2000).

## Conclusion

In line with the data obtained from secondary data sources, the following results were obtained with the information obtained. Festivals have a significant impact on the economic environment. On the day of the festival, many people start new business activities, and many people buy new products for this reason. These economic activities carried out by people during or on days close to festivals would enhance demand for products and services in the country and thus increase the production of goods and services. Companies' revenues will rise as production and sales rise, and these revenues will be distributed to various stakeholders within the company. The purchasing power of people will increase as the money supply expands. Therefore, festivals' effects on the economic environment are high (Srikanth & Ram, 2013).

Since spending more time at the festival means spending more money there, in terms of ticketed shows, the size and the length of the festival, and the length of the visitors' stay at the festival, and the size of the festival sponsorship (Saayman & Saayman, 2006) are effective factors on the expenditures. In addition, it is important that organizers hold festivals that arouse tourism demand in the low season or mid-season to provide the expected benefits to the local economy (Özdemir & Çulha, 2009). According to a study on the effects of visitor spending at two Scottish festivals in rural North Carolina, local restaurants, accommodation establishments, festival vendors, and sponsors make good use of visitor spending. In multi-day festivals in the region, the highest expenditure is for accommodation, while in one-day festivals, it is for food and beverages. The magnitude of the economic impact depends on both the festival's duration and the characteristics of the local economy (Chhabra, Sills & Cubbage, 2003). According to the research investigating the economic effects of the Calabar Carnival Festival in Nigeria (Esu, Arrey, Basil & Eyo, 2011), during the event, direct expenditures by the audience in terms of accommodation, food, entertainment, communication, souvenirs, and local transportation provide money inflow to the city's economy. If it were not for the Calabar Carnival, this expenditure would not have been made by the people involved. It is expected that this amount will contribute to the flows that will provide employment, income, and added value by affecting the economy directly or indirectly. The research results support that festivals should be used to accelerate destinations' economic development. For this reason, festivals' sustainability is also critical to realizing the long-term objectives of the state and people. According to the research measuring the direct impact of visitor spending in Missoula (USA), visitors spent a total of \$34,435,000 in Missoula. In addition, the event employed 2201 people in total (Ellard, Check & Nickerson, 1999). Also, a study on the economic effect of the Hockey tournament in Waikato, examined the expenditures of the participants, spectators, and organizers in the region due to the event. According to the results, the direct and indirect total economic impact of the tournament on the main Waikato region was approximately \$2.5 million, with a net added value of \$1.13 million (Daldy & Saunders, 2003). Moreover, Gibson, Waitt, Walmsley, & Connell (2010) consider the staging of festivals as a hybrid event where culture and economy meet. This shows that economic development planners in rural areas should take festivals seriously because even the most sensitive, social, and cultural festivals need audiences, staging, sound equipment, and support services. Therefore, festivals have both demand-side and supply-side economic effects.

The geographical region where festivals are held determines the demographic and socio-cultural characteristics of festival participants. Participants from different regions make various expenditures. These expenditures make significant contributions to the regional economy. Infrastructure and superstructure facilities are important factors in the success of the festivals. The better the infrastructure and superstructure, the easier it becomes to host different events. Thus, larger audiences can be attracted. Regional governments in developing countries should focus on local festivals because the participatory festivals to be organized locally contribute significantly to the regional economy (Saayman, & Saayman, 2006). Festivals can also bring economic benefits to host communities, such as tax revenues for governments, increased employment, job opportunities and additional income generation for host cities. In addition, the construction of new facilities and venues that the local people can use for other purposes after the festival, and the renewal of urban areas and infrastructure may justify the investment required for the organization of these festivals (Yolal et al., 2016).

Festivals are an ever-growing area of the tourism and entertainment industry worldwide. They exert significant economic, socio-cultural, and political effects on the destination or host community (Arcodia & Whitford, 2006). However, festivals are almost always considered as a development tool because they bring recognition and reputation to destinations (Ma & Lew, 2012). Festivals, which are perhaps inevitably included in tourism processes, revitalize a destination as a product and contribute to the authentic culture of a place when considered in terms of tourism. From the festival perspective, it can be seen as a way of meeting visitors' demands, increasing income sources, and boosting the destination's reputation (Duran, Hamarat & Özkul, 2014). Festivals, which are a substantial tourist attraction element, positively impact the revenue generated from tourism in the region where they are hosted, employment, image, and positive word-of-mouth advertising behavior toward the region (Giritlioğlu, Olcay & Özekici, 2015).

Local festivals are used as tools to promote tourism and stimulate the regional economy. However, it is difficult to assess the extent of the festival's contribution to local economic growth, and most studies do not examine this issue beyond standard multiplier effects. Investigating a festival's contribution to local tourism activity requires assessing its impact in various fields. The most visible effect is increased local income and employment opportunities driven by raised visitor volumes. This is an economic prosperity area that serves to cover up the negative economic impacts such as real estate speculation and rising prices (Felsenstein & Fleischer, 2003). Diedering & Kwiatkowski (2015) discussed the economic impact assessments of events and festivals. They investigated the general characteristics of the economic impact studies on festivals, the current status of the existing studies, and possible sources of bias. Overall, they concluded that economic impact analyzes are beneficial tools. However, they noted that these analyzes were prone to sabotage. For this reason, they emphasized that economic impact studies should be reviewed in the best way to reduce prejudices. Similarly, Jackson et al. (2005), argued that there was a tendency for advocates of individual festivals to exaggerate the benefits to be gained from holding a festival due to receiving support from the local community and sponsors and getting as much financial aid as possible from the limited funding provided by the state. Therefore, understanding visitors' spending patterns and activities is essential for events' strategic planning. Managers, researchers, and festival experts can use economic modeling to reveal the impact of tourist spending on the community. This information can help decision-makers develop plans to achieve community development goals (Cela, Knowles-Lankford & Lankford, 2007).

It is argued that festival organizers and local governments only consider the festivals' economic results while ignoring their social effects. However, it is not enough to care only about their economic impacts. Festivals' social, cultural, and environmental consequences that may contribute to society's progress should also be considered. Furthermore, it is necessary to establish a balance between economic and social objectives. This balance will encourage a sustainable approach to festivals within the community (Bagiran & Kurgun, 2016). Therefore, in terms of festivals sustainability, it is not appropriate to evaluate them only from an economic point of view, ignoring the more abstract elements of the experience such as values, beliefs, and emotions (O'Rourke, Irwin & Straker, 2011). Another area that festivals affect is the physical-environmental field. Festivals can produce negative externalities as environmental pollution, landscape change, and ecosystem degradation. Festivals can also impact the cultural and social realm. They present local cultural traditions and customs to visitors and thus protect the heritage. However, pressures to commercialize festivals to showcase local culture to attract visitors threaten sustainability (Felsenstein & Fleischer, 2003). Local governments can help prevent the loss of some of the region's unique values by supporting festivals (Alkan, 2015). One of the most crucial measures in preserving these values, aside from local government, is to ensure the maximum participation of the host society in both planning and organization because the local people are the most significant element that can notice a cultural detail that does not belong to them or that is differentiated.

It is obvious that the festivals have a wide range of positive economic, social, and cultural effects on the region and the local community, such as creating employment, increasing workforce and living standards, raising awareness in terms of tourism, increasing investments, opening new touristic businesses, contributing to accessibility, improving infrastructure, protecting heritage, strengthening regional values and traditions, instilling a spirit of togetherness in the local community and raising awareness about local products (Evvnt, 2021). There are a few things that need to be done to help local festivals become more sustainable. In consultation with local people, prospective festivals should be organized and economic development initiatives developed and promoted. Thus, local economic problems can be overcome (Mxunyelwa & Tshetu, 2018).

It is thought that the information obtained on the sustainability and contributions of the festivals through this study, which was carried out within the scope of document analysis, provides both practical and theoretical information. With the findings obtained from this study, the following suggestions can be presented to practitioners and future academic studies. It is very important for tourism managers, organizations and local governments that organize local festivals to be aware of these positive and negative effects of festivals. Creating these effects in line with local needs and providing opportunities will also provide local community support. Furthermore, to ensure sustainability and contribute more to the local people, it is recommended that the products offered for sale at the festival be procured from the region at reasonable prices, the organized areas are adequate and clean, cultural elements are not commercialized. At the same time, it is recommended to involve the local people in the organization of the festival, to get ideas from all stakeholders, and to keep the prices of the artisans at normal levels during the festival. Researchers who will conduct academic studies on local festivals may be advised to conduct studies on how festivals match local realities and how much they meet local needs.

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