

MITIGATING THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF CULTURAL AND EVENT TOURISM THROUGH COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES

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Abstract:

Cultural and event tourism has significantly evolved throughout history, profoundly impacting local communities. From ancient festivals or ceremonies and religious pilgrimages to modern events, these activities have always been integral to human society. They stimulate local economies by increasing income and job creation, investing in infrastructure and public services, and helping preserve and promote local heritage by encouraging communities to maintain their traditions and historic sites. Moreover, they facilitate cultural exchange and mutual understanding between visitors and locals. However, cultural and event tourism can also generate considerable negative impacts and challenges, such as pollution, pressure on infrastructure, over-commercialization, and loss of cultural authenticity. To mitigate these negative effects and creatively and sustainably capitalize on the positive ones, the involvement of local communities in tourism planning and management is crucial. In this research, we propose a matrix for understanding and mitigating the negative effects of cultural and event tourism. Key strategies include implementing sustainable practices, developing ecological infrastructure, and promoting economic diversification. Educating tourists and promoting responsible behaviour can also help protect the environment and cultural heritage. Based on this matrix, we have organized the stages of a structured process to mitigate the negative effects of cultural tourism and events on local communities, ensuring sustainable development while maximizing benefits.

Keywords: Cultural tourism, Economic impact, Sustainable practices, Local heritage, Community involvement

1. Introduction

Festivals and events have been a significant part of human society since ancient times. These activities included public displays, civic or religious rituals, collective celebrations, and sporting competitions (Quinn, 2009; Rappaport, 1999). Festivals were central to the Judeo-Christian tradition, amplifying devotion through collective celebration (Gold & Gold, 2020). In ancient Greece and Rome, sporting events, including the Olympic Games, were prestigious social activities. During the Middle Ages, festivals were funded by nobles or the church, combining religious rituals with spectacle (Cudny, 2014).

The existence of mixed reasons to participate in festivals is a constant in human civilization. Ritual and religious solemnity often went hand in hand with the agreeable and convivial character of the event, and even with collective effervescence (Cudny, 2016). People travelled to holy places to express their faith and seek spiritual and physical healing, but also to interact with others, gaining a kind of notoriety in their home communities for having “been there”.

The Renaissance and modern era stimulated travel for artistic education and inspiration. Later, The Grand Tour became popular among young European aristocrats (Ovesny & Taylor, 2022; Walchester, 2023), art and music festivals began to develop, and universal exhibitions in the 19th century became major events that attracted visitors from all over the world (Larrinaga & Vallejo, 2021). The Industrial Revolution made travel easier by developing transport infrastructure, making cultural and event tourism accessible to a wider segment of the population.

In the 21st century, globalization and technology have turned cultural and event tourism into a global industry. People travel to explore the cultural heritage of other countries by attending festivals and visiting museums and historical monuments. The development of events has contributed to the emergence and consolidation of various economic sub-sectors, significantly impacting economic growth in developed market economies. Cultural and event tourism continues to evolve, adapting to new trends and technologies, and remains a vital component of the global tourism industry.

2. The impact of cultural and event tourism on local communities

Cultural and event tourism has become a significant aspect of the tourism industry and has profound effects on local communities, bringing both positive and negative effects. There is a significant amount of research that has focused on the economic, social and cultural impact and benefits (Carlsen, et al., 2007; Getz, 2005; Getz, 2008; Richards & King, 2022).

2.1. Economic impact and infrastructure development

Cultural tourism significantly boosts local economies by increasing revenue through visitor spending on accommodation, food, transport and souvenirs. According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), cultural tourism represents a substantial part of the global tourism market, contributing to economic growth and job creation (UNWTO, 2021; Afouxenidi, 2022; UNESCO, 2021).

One of the most important and widely recognized benefits of cultural and event tourism is its contribution to the development of the local economy. In simple terms, events (cultural, but not only) attract visitors who spend money on accommodation, food, transport and other services, thus stimulating local businesses - hotels, restaurants and shops, but also related services (Dwyer, et al., 2005). It is not just about an increase in tourism and related businesses, cultural tourism can stimulate the emergence and development of new businesses in different production and service sectors, further increasing economic opportunities, boosting local entrepreneurship (Angelini, et al., 2020; Ioan-Franc & Istoc, 2007; Moscardo, 2007).

Part of the spending made by tourists can support the creation of new jobs and increase the income of (some) residents. It is known that festivals and cultural events, sports, entertainment, etc. often require additional staff, from security personnel to vendors, providing temporary employment opportunities (University of Minnesota, 2023). Some researchers say that, equally important, is the increased visibility of the host community gained through these occasions, which can attract future tourists, creating long-lasting economic benefits (Pereira, et al., 2021).

The development of cultural tourism often requires improvements in local infrastructure as improving transport networks, accommodation facilities and public amenities. Even though there are critics that these improvements are incorrectly prioritized, disfavours urgent investments for a larger number of residents, it is obvious that such developments not only benefit tourists but also improve the quality of life of local residents. Improved infrastructure can lead to better accessibility and connectivity, encouraging further economic and social development.

2.2. Social and cultural impact

Cultural tourism plays a crucial role in preserving and promoting local heritage. It encourages communities to maintain and showcase their traditions, crafts and historic sites, which might otherwise be neglected (Saarinen, 2019). This conservation effort not only benefits tourists, but also instills a sense of pride and identity among local residents (Richards, 2007; Richards & King, 2022; González-Reverté, 2023; Badulescu, et al., 2024). For example, cultural festivals and events provide platforms for local people to celebrate and share their heritage, encouraging community cohesion and cultural continuity (Yolal, et al., 2016; UNESCO, 2003). In addition, cultural tourism facilitates cultural exchange and mutual understanding. Cultural events, in particular, help preserve and promote local traditions and heritage, providing a platform for showcasing local arts, crafts and customs that might otherwise be overlooked (UNESCO, 2003; Angelini, et al., 2020; Bachleitner & Zins, 1999). Visitors gain insight into the local way of life, traditions and values, while locals are exposed to different cultures and perspectives. This interaction can lead to greater social harmony and global awareness, allowing both locals and visitors to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of different cultures (Getz, 2005; Espeso-Molinero, 2022), successfully promoting exchange cultural and preservation of tangible and intangible heritage (Smith, 2015; McKercher & du Cros, 2002).

2.3. The impact on the environment

Although cultural tourism has positive economic and social effects, it also generates negative impacts, raising serious environmental problems and challenges. The vast majority of researchers and practitioners accept that the impact

of cultural tourism, but especially event tourism, on the environment can be both positive and negative. In positive terms, it is argued that events can raise (more indirectly) awareness of environmental issues and promote sustainable practices (UNESCO, 2024; García-Hernández, et al., 2017; European Commission, 2024; Smith & Ripp, 2020). For example, there are some “green” festivals, which often emphasize education, recycling, waste reduction and the use of renewable energy sources. However, they are rather few, and the negative effects of the remains can be substantial. The increased number of visitors can lead to environmental degradation, through pollution, waste generation and pressure on local resources. Large events can lead to the generation of huge amounts of waste, difficult to manage in the short term, pollution of all kinds and pressure on local resources and infrastructure (Nadotti & Vannoni, 2019; Moisescu et al., 2019). Noise pollution, traffic congestion and damage to natural sites are common concerns associated with cultural and event tourism (Moisescu et al., 2019). Optimistic views say that even under these conditions, with appropriate management and sustainable practices, these negative impacts can be mitigated (GreenTourism, 2023). International institutions lead by example, promoting eco-tourism practices and educating tourists about environmental conservation can help protect natural and cultural sites (UNWTO, 2015; UNWTO, 2005). Even though certain positive experiences in this regard are encouraging, there are limited examples that can be applied as solutions in the case of mega-events, which attract huge flows of tourists in short periods of time, often in culturally and environmentally fragile areas.

Despite its benefits, cultural tourism can also lead to economic, social, environmental challenges, but also over-commercialization and loss of authenticity. Research has also highlighted the existence of negative impacts, real and potential, of the development of cultural events, festivals, on the community, on the quality of service provision to residents, on the increase in the cost of living, including on the danger of “festivalization” and excessive commercialization and the weakening of local cultures through globalized creative production (Richards & King, 2022). As more destinations around the world develop 'event cities' programs or position themselves as 'festival cities' (Gold & Gold, 2020), the question of whether festivals offer genuine distinction in a globalizing world becomes even more pertinent (Cudny, 2016; Richards & King, 2022).

To sum up, event tourism can bring significant economic, social and cultural benefits to local communities, increasing social cohesion and awareness of environmental challenges. By adopting sustainable practices and involving local stakeholders, communities can maximize the benefits of cultural tourism while minimizing the downsides and negative impacts of hosting events.

3. Approaches and strategies to mitigate the negative effects of cultural and event tourism

In order to mitigate the negative effects of cultural and events tourism, it is essential to involve local communities in tourism planning and decision-making processes. This ensures that tourism development aligns with local values and needs, preserving the authenticity of cultural experiences. In addition, the implementation of policies that promote sustainable tourism practices can help balance the benefits and disadvantages of cultural tourism (Postma & Schmuecker, 2017; Drápela, 2023; Istoc, 2012; Breban et al., 2024). Strategies such as

implementing sustainable practices, improving infrastructure and involving local stakeholders can help mitigate adverse effects (World Bank, 2011; Mester, et al., 2016). Wells et al (2021) or Eikelenboom & Long (2023), analyze different ways of engaging stakeholders and how these engagements contribute to sustainable development, and supporting the circular economy. Integrating social aspects with economic and environmental concerns through stakeholder participation can help avoid marginalization, improve and spread sustainable practices. Local communities can influence tourism planning and management to mitigate adverse effects (Church & Coles, 2007), can employ diverse resources and strategies to achieve sustainable tourism, and there are successful examples of community involvement in tourism projects around the world (Harris, et al., 2002). For example, organizers can work with local authorities to ensure that appropriate waste management and transport solutions are in place. Additionally, community involvement in the planning process can ensure that events align with local values and needs, thereby increasing their positive impact (University of Minnesota, 2023).

Mitigating the negative effects of cultural and event tourism on local communities is a serious aspect of sustainable tourism management. The literature employed below highlights several strategies that can help balance the benefits of tourism in order to protect local communities and environments.

3.1. Community-based approaches

An effective strategy is to integrate community-based approaches. This implies the active involvement of local residents in planning and decision-making processes related to tourism development. By doing so, communities can ensure that tourism initiatives align with their values and needs, thereby minimizing potential conflicts and encouraging a sense of ownership and pride (Drápela, 2023; González-Reverté, 2023). For example, community-led tourism projects can help preserve cultural heritage while providing economic benefits directly to local residents. Implementing strict regulations and policies is another crucial strategy. Governments and local authorities can establish guidelines to control the extent and nature of tourism activities to prevent over-tourism and its associated problems such as environmental degradation and cultural commercialization (Drápela, 2023; García-Buades, et al., 2022).

These regulations could include limits on the number of visitors to sensitive sites, zoning laws to protect residential areas, and requirements for sustainable practices among tour operators.

3.2. Environmental conservation measures

For a long time, it has been considered that environmental conservation measures are essential to mitigate the ecological impact of tourism and this includes various “green” practices such as waste reduction, recycling and the use of renewable energy sources (Drápela, 2023). In our context, festivals and events can adopt green initiatives (i.e. recycling bins, biodegradable materials and encouraging public transportation in order to reduce their carbon footprint). Also, educating tourists and participants about the importance of conserving natural and cultural sites can encourage a more responsible and active behaviour.

3.3. Economic diversification actions

Perhaps paradoxically, reducing (excessive) dependence on tourism can reduce the associated risks, but this must be done through intelligent diversification of the local economy, creating a more resilient economic, avoiding the vulnerability generated by the fluctuations in the tourism industry (World Economic Forum (WEF), 2024; Moscardo, 2007). Communities can benefit from this approach because it helps to reduce the exodus of local residents due to rising property values and the cost of living, fuelled by tourism demand.

3.4. Cultural conservation initiatives

Cultural heritage (tangible and intangible) is an essential element in cultural tourism, but it is fragile and distinct, and understanding its cultural impact requires implementing cultural conservation and promotion initiatives. In this sense, we can refer to supporting local artisans and cultural experts, promoting traditional crafts and performances, and ensuring that tourism activities respect and celebrate local customs and traditions (Drápela, 2023; Li, et al., 2021; Badulescu & Badulescu, 2017), rather than destroying or denigrating them. Through such careful measures, communities can maintain their cultural integrity, while benefiting from tourism activities generated around these cultural heritage values.

3.5. Collaborative planning and management

To effectively mitigate the negative impacts of tourism, communities and all stakeholders must accept joint planning measures and collaborative management. In other words, various stakeholders, including local governments, tourism operators, community organizations and residents, must collaborate, exchange information with each other and think about common, not disparate actions (Hoi An Center for Monuments Management and Preservation, 2008). Comprehensive management plans, which balance economic development with social and environmental sustainability and the preservation of local culture and identity, can only be created and implemented through joint efforts (Moscardo, 2007; Nadotti & Vannoni, 2019).

Attempting a (partial) conclusion, we could consider that mitigating the negative effects of cultural and event tourism on local communities is a multifaceted endeavour, requiring a careful approach that includes community involvement, strict regulations, environmental conservation measures, economic diversification beyond tourism, cultural preservation and collaborative planning actions. Adopting comprehensive strategies in this regard would allow communities to benefit from tourism development, while minimizing its negative impacts.

4. Proposing a matrix for mitigating the negative effects of cultural and event tourism

Based on the above, we have proposed a matrix indicating ways to mitigate the negative effects of cultural and event tourism on the local economy and communities. It involves a structured approach that engages different aspects of sustainability, highlighting the necessary stages and actions (see Table 1 below):

Table 1. The steps of mitigating the negative effects of cultural and event tourism

Stages	Actions	Stakeholders involved	Expected results
Assessment and planning	Carrying out comprehensive impact assessments (economic, social, environmental)	Local authorities, tourism experts	Detailed understanding of current impact and areas requiring intervention
	Developing strategic plans with clear objectives and timelines	Community leaders, planners	The well-defined roadmap for the development of sustainable tourism
	Identifying key stakeholders and allocating resources	NGOs, local businesses	Effective resource allocation and stakeholder engagement
Community involvement	Organization of public meetings and workshops	Residents, local businesses	Increased community involvement and buy-in
	Educating the community about sustainable tourism practices	Educational institutions, NGOs	Increased awareness and adoption of sustainable practices
	Establishing feedback mechanisms (surveys, suggestion boxes)	Local authorities, residents	Continuous improvement based on community input
Implementation of sustainable practices	Promoting ecological practices (recycling, waste reduction)	Event organizers, local businesses	Reduced environmental footprint of tourism activities
	Encouraging the use of renewable energy sources	Utility companies, event organizers	Carbon reduction and sustainable energy use
	Supporting local businesses and crafts	Local businesses, artisans, promoters	Economic diversification and preservation of local culture
The regulatory framework	Development and enforcement of tourism regulations (visitor limits, zoning regulations and hours)	Government, local authorities	Controlled growth of tourism and protection of residential areas
	Implementation of sustainable tourism policies	Political factors, tourism boards	Balanced development that aligns with sustainability goals
	Regular monitoring of compliance and impact	Inspectors, local authorities	Ensuring regulatory compliance and timely adjustments
Infrastructure development	Improving transport and public facilities	Government, infrastructure developers	Accessibility and better quality of life for residents and tourists

Stages	Actions	Stakeholders involved	Expected results
	Development of ecological infrastructure (green buildings, ecological public transport)	Architects, urban planners	Sustainable infrastructure that supports tourism and community needs
Improvement continues	Regularly reviewing and updating strategic plans	Local authorities, community leaders	Adaptive management that responds to changing conditions
	Promoting partnerships for sustainable tourism	NGOs, international organizations	Improved collaboration and resource sharing
	Conducting periodic research and impact studies	Academic institutions, research bodies	Up-to-date data and insights for informed decision-making

This matrix outlines a comprehensive process for mitigating the negative impacts of cultural and event tourism on local communities. By following these phases – assessment and planning, community involvement, implementation of sustainable practices, regulatory framework, infrastructure development and continuous improvement – communities can achieve sustainable tourism development. This structured approach ensures that tourism benefits are maximized while minimizing the negative impact on the local environment and culture.

5. The process of mitigating the negative effects of cultural and event tourism on local communities

Mitigating the negative effects of cultural and event tourism on local communities involves a structured process that ensures sustainable development while maximizing benefits. In the paragraphs below, we have explained the key stages of this process, also summarized in Figure 1.

The first stage - *Assessment and planning*, involves a comprehensive assessment of the current tourism landscape. This includes assessing the economic, social, cultural and environmental impact of tourism on the community. Tools such as surveys, interviews and environmental impact assessments can provide valuable information (Nadotti & Vannoni, 2019; Drápela, 2023). Based on the assessment, a strategic plan is developed that should outline clear objectives, identify key stakeholders and propose specific actions to mitigate negative impacts. It should also include a timetable and allocate resources effectively (GreenTourism, 2023).

The next stage - *Community involvement*, i.e. the involvement of local stakeholders, including residents, business owners and local authorities, is crucial, ensuring that community needs and concerns are addressed. Public meetings, workshops, and focus groups can facilitate this engagement (Postma & Schmuecker, 2017). Also educating the community about the potential impact of tourism and the importance of sustainable practices is essential and this can be achieved through campaigns, workshops and educational programs (GreenTourism, 2023).

Stage 3 - *Implementation of sustainable practices*, environmental measures and green practices is a key step, promoting recycling, reducing waste, encouraging

the use of renewable energy sources, using biodegradable materials, providing recycling bins at events etc. To reduce dependence on a particular form of tourism, there are necessary significant steps and efforts in order to diversify the local economy by supporting other sectors such as agriculture, crafts and technology, diversification helping to create a more resilient community (GreenTourism, 2023).

In the stage 4 - *The regulatory framework*, the development and enforcement of regulations governing tourism activities is vital. These regulations may include limits on the number of visitors, time slots for activities zoning regulations to protect residential areas, and requirements for sustainable practices among tour operators (Postma & Schmuecker, 2017; Nadotti & Vannoni, 2019). Continuous monitoring and evaluation of tourism activities helps compliance with regulations and assess the effectiveness of mitigation measures through periodic data collection and analysis to identify areas for improvement (Drápela, 2023).

Next, the *Continuous improvement*, specific for the 5th stage, means establishing feedback mechanisms allows for ongoing community involvement and input and adaptation of strategies, and these include regular surveys, feedback gathering, and online platforms for community members to voice their opinions (Postma & Schmuecker, 2017). Based on feedback and monitoring results, the strategic plan should be adjusted as needed. Adaptive management ensures that mitigation strategies remain effective and responsive to changing conditions.

Finally, drawing *conclusions and resuming the process* on new, improved bases, is a necessity of keeping attention on the essential challenges and adapting to the transformations coming from the tourism phenomenon, in continuous expansion and diversification.

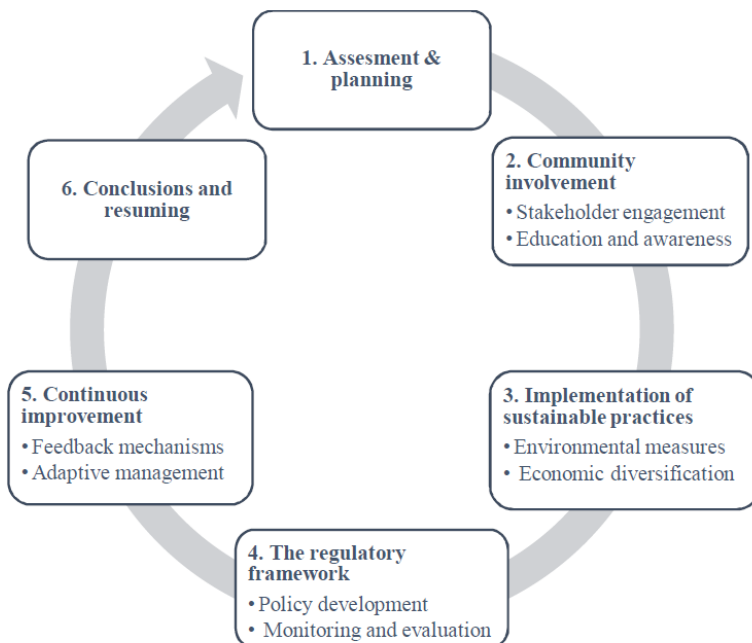


Figure 1. Key stages of a structured process of mitigating the negative effects of cultural and event tourism on local communities

6. Conclusion

The analysis of the evolution of cultural tourism and events throughout history, highlights significant economic, social and cultural benefits on local communities, but also challenging and negative effects. In our research we analyzed the various strategies for mitigating the negative effects of cultural and event tourism, with a special focus on community involvement and the implementation of sustainable practices. We also have proposed a matrix stressing the main phases and actions, together with the responsibilities of the stakeholders involved and results expected. By following the steps of a structured process – assessment and planning, community engagement, implementation of sustainable practices, regulatory framework and continuous improvement – communities can effectively mitigate the negative effects of cultural and event tourism. We stressed that this structured approach could ensure tourism development is sustainable, beneficial to both the local community and the environment, ensuring the protection of cultural and natural heritage and the preservation of authenticity. It is becoming increasingly clear that cultural and event tourism can bring significant benefits to local communities, but its development requires careful and collaborative management to maximize the benefits and minimize the negative impacts.

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