Predicting Economic, Social, and Cultural Benefits of Event Tourism in Smaller Cities: A Supply-Side Perspective

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.3727/152599524X17229013810194

Predicting economic, social and cultural benefits of event tourism in smaller cities: A supply-side perspective

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The authors have no conflict of interest to disclose.

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Abstract

This study identifies the perceived economic, social and cultural benefits of events in smaller UK cities, which have hitherto been neglected given the focus on large cities. It also adopts a multi-destination perspective to address the call to widen research into event impacts away from single-event case studies. The paper applies a cross-sectional approach to survey 111 city event managers and analyse their opinions on the event tourism antecedents contributing to perceived economic, social and cultural benefits. The study's theoretical contribution relates to the identification of five significant antecedents of economic benefits, three significant antecedents of social benefits, and one significant antecedent of cultural benefits. The paper also outlines the practical implications of the findings to inform representatives of smaller cities seeking to use events to secure this range of benefits and develop a more strategic orientation.

Keywords: event tourism; economic impacts; social impacts; cultural impacts; event strategy

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Introduction

Events have many benefits for place development, particularly for smaller cities (Richards & Duif, 2018), or for social (Wood, 2017) and cultural outcomes (Ziakas, 2013b). Indeed, the concept of eventfulness (Richards & Palmer, 2010) embodies the integration of events with other strategies of a city, including tourism, economic, social and cultural development. Not surprisingly, there has been increasing interest in events from academics (Getz, 2013; Kim et al., 2013) and policymakers (Whitford, 2009), who see events as a boost for tourism.

Within larger cities, the responsibility for event tourism is frequently shouldered by a department in the local government, e.g., marketing or economic regeneration, a Business Improvement District (BID), a Destination Marketing Organisation (DMO) or an event development agency. Smaller cities have far fewer financial resources or specialist management staff for the development of event tourism (Gary, 2005). Moreover, while local governments still appreciate the value of events (Wood, 2017), given the nature of their public funding, they must justify the economic return that events contribute alongside their social and cultural value (Clifton et al., 2012), thereby further disadvantaging smaller cities.

In the UK, city status is awarded by the Crown, and consequently, a large population does not necessarily constitute city designation; indeed, some towns have larger populations than several cities. In England and Wales, the Office of National Statistics (ONS, 2013) provides a useful categorisation of the size of cities by population of usual residents: Minor (<10,000); Small (10,000 to 99,999); Medium (100,000 to 499,999), Large (500,000 to 999,999) and Major (1,000,000+).

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Major cities account for less than a third of the total population of England and Wales. Below this, 52% of the population live in places between 10,000 and 999,999 people, classified as small to large towns and cities; these are referred to as smaller cities within the context of this study.

Getz and Page (2016) suggest previous studies on the impacts of event tourism have focused on mega-cities, which the United Nations defines as having a 10m+ population (UN, 2022). London is the only city in England and Wales that meets this level. As such, there is an opportunity to add to the discourse of event tourism studies by focusing on a smaller-city perspective (Richards & Duif, 2018). Moreover, while well-resourced, large cities can spend significant resources on event policy, management and delivery, the options for event provision in smaller cities are more constrained due to austerity cuts through the 2010s (Wood, 2017).

This study aims to identify the factors that contribute to perceived benefits of event tourism in the context of smaller cities in England and Wales from a supply-side perspective. That is to seek the cities' perspective of perceived event tourism benefits and the factors which influence them. Previous studies from a supply-side perspective have been undertaken across a range of different event contexts. Gursoy et al. (2004) examined perceived socio-economic impacts of festivals and events, Xie and Sinwald (2016) looked at event organiser perspectives on event impacts, while Sangkaew et al. (2019) sought organiser perspectives on technology adoption.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. First, the extant literature on perceived benefits of event tourism, the proposition and strategies for event tourism in smaller cities and governance of England and Wales is reviewed. Second, the research method is outlined. Third, we present and discuss the findings. Finally,

we outline the theoretical contribution and practical implications within the smaller city context, address the study's limitations and make recommendations for further research.

Literature Review

Proposition for event tourism in smaller cities

Event tourism, by many definitions, is the use of events to create value, predominantly in terms of tangible economic value and intangible visitor satisfaction (Dwyer et al., 2000; Kim et al., 2013). Academics have widely debated the use of events to help promote places for tourism benefits (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2018; Lew, 2017; Ormerod & Wood, 2021). There is clear agreement that events can provide economic benefits to places and smaller cities can also take advantage of these opportunities (Richards & Duif, 2018).

Moreover, while identifying the proposition for events portfolios in smaller cities is poorly represented in the literature, some case studies have shown some potential for applying these ideas (Buultjens & Cairncross, 2015; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2018; Kennell, 2010). While these papers add to the discourse, they are focused on individual event examples or a narrow context, rather than the wider event portfolio perspective.

Thus, understanding the challenges smaller cities face in this context is relatively unknown. Larger cities have the resources to overcome big problems with big solutions through consultants (Richards & Duif, 2018) that smaller cities cannot afford. More work is required to fully understand the complex, multi-faceted environment of smaller governments, with fewer resources, and a higher dependency on local community support for events. Arguably, smaller cities may struggle to be seen as a destination and have been ignored by urban theorists (Bell

& Jayne, 2018). Moreover, at this scale, academics have argued the value of events could be construed as placemaking rather than destination marketing (Bell & Jayne, 2018; Coghlan et al., 2017; Custódio et al., 2018).

Getz and Page (2016) developed five propositions of event tourism that help to direct the discourse of event tourism studies. In seeking a suitable framework for why cities pursue an event tourism strategy these propositions draw on existing event and tourism literature and are a useful starting point to develop hypotheses for how the economic, social and cultural benefits of event tourism are perceived.

Perceived benefits of event tourism

The study of economic, social, and cultural impacts in event tourism is crucial for understanding its multifaceted effects. Rivera et al. (2008) and Kim and Uysal (2003) highlight the economic benefits and social costs of such events, while de Grosbois (2009) emphasises the need for a holistic evaluation that includes all three dimensions. Lu et al. (2020) and Hodur and Leistritz (2006) further stress the importance of considering event strength, government support, and key considerations in estimating economic impacts. Baqaain and Wang (2021) add to this by exploring the social impacts of tourism on host communities.

Event tourism is recognised for its potential to generate significant economic benefits for host communities. These benefits include increased tourist arrivals (Fourie & Spronk, 2011), job creation, and infrastructure development (Matiza & Oni, 2014). Events, especially large-scale sports and cultural events, can attract a considerable number of visitors, leading to increased consumption, tourism receipts, and employment opportunities. However, the economic gains are often dependent on various factors such as the type of event, the host country's level of development,

and the timing of the event (Fourie & Spronk, 2011). Moreover, the studies suggest that while economic benefits are a major driver for hosting events, they should be carefully appraised against potential costs, including the displacement of regular tourism and the investment required for event infrastructure (Mules & Dwyer, 2005; Torres-Delgado & Saarinen, 2014).

The social impacts of event tourism are complex and can be both positive and negative. Positive impacts include community development, pride, and enhanced quality of life (Matiza & Oni, 2014; Perić, 2018). Events can serve as catalysts for social cohesion, offering opportunities for cultural exchange and fostering a sense of community among residents. However, negative social impacts such as increased crime, congestion, and social costs are also noted (Kim & Uysal, 2003). These impacts highlight the need for effective management and planning to mitigate adverse effects and enhance the positive social legacy of events.

Cultural impacts are closely tied to the social aspects of event tourism, with events often serving as platforms for cultural expression and exchange. Events can promote cultural heritage, increase cultural understanding among visitors, and foster pride in local traditions (de Grosbois, 2009; Mangion & McNabb, 2005). However, there is also a risk of cultural commodification and potential conflicts between preserving local culture and catering to tourist expectations. These studies underscore the importance of balancing the promotion of culture with the preservation of the host community's cultural integrity.

Much of the previous research on event tourism benefits has focused on the economic value for events, for example, taking the form of metrics such as visitor footfall (Wood, 2017) or employment and regeneration (Bramwell, 1997; Dobson, 2000). This may be easy to measure and justify in larger cities with a developed

tourism industry. However, in smaller cities, economic reasoning is not always straightforward and there will be additional social and cultural attachments to this value (Crespi-Vallbona & Richards, 2007; Liu, 2016; Mair et al., 2021; Ziakas, 2013b). Additionally, O'Sullivan (2009) suggests that while there are good intentions for social outcomes, many public events still heavily focus on measuring economic outputs.

While there is evidence of social and cultural impacts, the focus is often on how smaller cities can replicate some of the economic effects their larger counterparts enjoy (Bracalente et al., 2011; Buultjens & Cairncross, 2015; Getz, 2019). However, economic benefits are not always the primary proposition, with social and cultural benefits also being prioritised (Pugh & Wood, 2004; Wood, 2006). Mair and Whitford (2013) argue that these socio-cultural impacts are one of the most important areas of future event research.

The concept of perceived benefits of events has been studied from several different perspectives. Most of this type of research has focused on residents' perceptions of events (Custódio et al., 2018; Jackson, 2008; Lee et al., 2022). Other key areas include the perception of attendees (Inoue & Havard, 2014) and volunteers (Hallmann & Zehrer, 2016). Gursoy et al. (2004) looked at the perceptions of festival managers to a range of socio-economic issues. Finally, Andersson et al. (2020) asked DMO employees about their perception of risk in relation to the event tourism portfolio. Given the relative neglect of the supply-side perspective, particularly in a smaller city context, this study has focussed on the perceived benefits of events through the lens of smaller city event planners and managers.

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Event Tourism Strategies

City governance or a supply-side perspective often involves coordination of the event strategy and programme (Pugh & Wood, 2004). In some cases, this might include a written event policy, which directs the strategy or a curated event portfolio (Ziakas, 2010, 2013a). Much of the early work in event policy was centred on business and economic outcomes, driven by neoliberal governments (Hall, 2006). Since then, further work has expanded the policy debate to include broader social and cultural elements (Dredge & Whitford, 2010; Getz, 2009). However, even in the case of larger cities with significant resources, getting alignment between the objectives of the destination and those of a broad range of stakeholders can still be challenging (Ziakas, 2019). Moreover, while event portfolios receive increasing attention from academics (Ziakas & Getz, 2020), their strategic application and operationalisation in the context of smaller cities remains embryonic and under researched.

Event policies have become a valuable tool to set a direction and strategy (Hall, 2006; Richards, 2017; Smith, 2013). With the emergence of the eventful city, events began to facilitate achieving a wide range of economic, social and cultural policy outcomes for a city. Wood (2017) found that local government perceptions of, and approaches to, event-related strategies have changed in the last two decades; she identified four key themes: expectations and perceived benefits of events; level of community and local government involvement; funding sources and models; and event value and appraisal. On the subject of “event appropriation”, where traditional or cultural events are exploited for economic or political ends, Rojek (2014) argues that while this practice is commonplace in relation to mega and major events, it is also prevalent in minor events, such as those hosted by smaller places.

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Getz (2008) defines event tourism strategy as either top-down or bottom-up, and advocates that the latter approach may be preferable. Top-down events are created by an authoritarian body (local government, DMO or event agency) while bottom-up events are largely created organically by wider stakeholders. While a top-down approach has been the dominant strategy, bottom-up approaches may yield more long-term sustainability. Richards and Duif (2018) argue that for smaller cities to be prosperous, they should adopt a holistic placemaking strategy and engage with local stakeholders instead of simply copying larger cities. Norman and Nyarko (2021) found that event-engagement activities undertaken by policymakers in a range of city sizes create value within an event tourism network. These value creating activities are crucial to understanding how smaller public organisations can both foster and reconcile the cost of event tourism (Burgan & Mules, 2001). Bottom-up or organic developments may have economic, social or cultural outcomes, which smaller cities can capitalise on in the absence of a top-down approach by their policymakers.

Wood (2009) suggests there is a lack of objective setting in local government event departments. However, there has been limited research into the event policy implementation in smaller cities, except for a few case studies (Alves et al., 2010; Hallmann & Breuer, 2011; Ziakas, 2007). The role of local government as a facilitator of collaborative or bottom-up policy and strategy has been explored by several authors (Christou, 2017; Cowell, 2004; McDonnell, 2020; Van Houwelingen, 2017; Van Niekerk, 2014). Studies have shown that citizens of smaller municipalities have stronger political ties and participate more in local politics (McDonnell, 2020; Van Houwelingen, 2017), while Maguire (2019) highlights the lack of planning for socio-economic impact from events by local governments (mainly in smaller cities). Additionally, Whitford (2009, p.677) suggests that implementation is too often

developed by "insular policy communities" rather than involving the wider stakeholders. Similarly, Quinn (2010) argued that common cultural bases for collaboration need to be identified between arts festivals and tourism sectors.

For this study, a range of factors identified in the literature as positively influencing the benefits from event tourism (economic, social and cultural) was sought as a framework for data collection. Whitford (2009) presented a framework for facilitating event public policy that included three areas, event policy pathway, event policy community and event development paradigms. While this provides a valuable tool for policy development, it lacks the specific elements needed to operationalise it. Stokes (2008) proposed a framework for event tourism strategy that ranged from corporate-led to community-based that may be more useful in understanding which stakeholders plan or create the events. Further to this, Ziakas (2014) suggests that an event policy requires event-network embeddedness, interorganisational reciprocity, event integrity and participatory interconnectedness.

Table 1 highlights the critical literature that surrounds work on event tourism strategy and policy. This has been summarised into three key questions which represent three critical strategic planning antecedents: (1) is there an event strategy or policy? (2) who plans or creates the events in the city? (3) how are events created?

<<<INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE>>>

Governance in England and Wales

Governance within England and Wales varies by size, structure and available resources (Grail et al., 2020). Additionally, their environment plays a part in

understanding what they seek to achieve from events, including urban space, place and process (Richards & Colombo, 2017).

There are 343 local governments (also known as local authorities), comprising five different types: county councils, district councils, unitary authorities, metropolitan districts and London boroughs (GOV.UK, 2019). Since 2010, local governments have faced a 49.1% real-term reduction in grants and significant cuts to their budgets, as the UK government oversaw a decade of austerity following the 2008 financial crisis (Morse, 2018). As a result, funding was prioritised to essential statutory services and away from cultural activities. Rex and Campbell (2021) found that not all the cuts to cultural spending occurred equally across the country and that there was significant variability across local authorities, ranging from 1% to 94%.

Business improvement districts (BIDs) have been an increasingly popular public/private sector initiative developed during the last decade of austerity (Grail et al., 2020). BIDs are private non-profit organisations established in urban areas to help deliver public services and improve economic benefits by charging an additional levy on local businesses (Meltzer, 2011; Ziebarth, 2020). It is not hard to see why they would be a popular solution to a smaller city suffering from public funding austerity. However, there has been some criticism by those who see BIDS as increasing private or corporate control and weakening elected local government (De Magalhães, 2014, De Magalhães & Trigo, 2017). Opinions aside, their influence on event tourism in smaller cities is substantial. In their extensive review of BIDs in the United Kingdom (which includes England and Wales), Grail et al. (2020, p. 74) state that there are now over 300 BIDs across the United Kingdom, which “will be responsible to some degree for planning and implementing events”.

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Based on the review of the pertinent literature, three hypotheses were posited:

H1: The perceived predictors of economic benefits from events in large cities are also effective in the context of smaller cities.

H2: The perceived predictors of social benefits from events in large cities are also effective in the context of smaller cities.

H3: The perceived predictors of cultural benefits from events in large cities are also effective in the context of smaller cities.

Methodology

Following ethical approval, a cross-sectional study approach was used for data collection, which included a questionnaire survey using Qualtrics as the primary tool. Cross-sectional studies are useful in identifying associations between different variables (Creswell, 2022). The design of the survey instrument was based on a critical review of the extant literature to identify key concepts and variables and to ensure validity (Fink, 2017). The operationalisation of the extant literature can be found in Table 2. Following this, the survey tool was tested using a protocol analysis (Fink, 2017; Fowler, 2014) with three city event staff representatives to ensure understanding of the questions and scales.

<<<INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE>>>

A purposive sampling method was used (Saunders et al., 2019) to obtain a self-selected sample of participants at the Association of Town and City Management (ATCM) annual summer school conference. The ATCM is a not-for-profit membership organisation dedicated to promoting the vitality and viability of urban centres across the United Kingdom (ATCM, 2021). The organisation's membership is made up of nearly 500 practitioners from local governments, BIDs

and other partnerships. Initial data collection used iPads and then follow-up emails to non-attendees of the conference from the ATCM membership. Participants comprised of local government and BID members with responsibility for, or association with, their respective event programme. The survey asked respondents to rate the three dependent variables: perceived economic, social and cultural benefits from their event tourism, using a constant-sum (100 points) question featuring all three benefit types, a technique previously used for attribute importance (Louviere & Islam, 2008). Respondents were then asked to rate a series of statements relating to the predictors of their event tourism's perceived economic, social and cultural benefits (Table 3), using 5-point Likert-type scales ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5), never (1) to always (5) and very unimportant (1) to very important (5) and a further constant sum (100 points) question. The questionnaire also included questions on city population size, organisation type, the role of the event-lead, the proportion of the event-lead's time devoted to events, the rationale for using events and the presence of an event policy.

<<<INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE>>>

In total, 112 questionnaires were obtained, 51 in person at the conference and 61 via email afterwards. From this number, 111 of them were completed in full and useable. The sample characteristics are given in Table 4. The Office for National Statistics identifies 494 places in the UK with a population of 10,000 or more (ONS, 2013); 106 respondents were representative of this number, giving a sample size of 21.5%.

<<<INSERT TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE>>>

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Data analysis

Following normality testing of the scaled data elicited from the questionnaire, base 10 logarithmic transformations were used to normalise all variables which violated the assumption of normality. Ordinary least-squares linear regression analyses were then undertaken to assess the significance of a range of variables in predicting the economic, social, and cultural benefits of events from the perspective of smaller city event-leads. We then used independent samples t-tests and one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA) to test for differences in economic, social, and cultural benefits of events, and in the factors which had a statistically significant influence on these benefits, on the basis of 1) city population size; 2) type of events organisation; and 3) the existence or otherwise of a current events policy or strategy. A Games-Howell procedure was used for the post-hoc multiple comparison tests because it controls for Type I error rate while maintaining both statistical power and accuracy when sample sizes are unequal (Field, 2017). We also used Welch's t-tests where a Levene's test showed that the assumption of homogeneity of variance had been violated (Moder, 2010).

Results

The majority (66%) of responses were from organisations in cities with a population size between 25,000-149,999 and most respondents worked for either a regional, local or parish government organisation (58%) or for a BID (45%). The large majority (80%) also reported that their lead for events worked full-time, while the proportion of that role dedicated to events was more evenly balanced across the categories: 0-24% (34%); 25-49% (18%); 50-74% (23%); 75-100% (28%). Just under half (46%) of the respondents reported that their city had an event policy.

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Predictors of perceived economic, social and cultural benefits

The statistically significant predictors of the perceived economic, social and cultural benefits are shown in Table 5. Five items were significant predictors of the economic benefits of events, explaining 27% of the variance in this outcome. Interestingly, the ‘priority given to attracting tourists to the city' has the highest positive perceived impact on economic benefits; for a one unit increase in the priority of attracting tourists to the city, there is a 0.35 unit increase in economic benefits. The ‘percentage of the annual event tourism programme developed by the local community’ (0.29) and the ‘percentage of the annual event tourism programme developed by the respondents’ organisation/ the DMO’ (0.25), together with the ‘level of encouragement given to the community and/or local businesses to create and run their own events (0.19) also have a perceived economic benefit. By contrast, the ‘priority given to making the city more liveable' (-0.32) has a negative impact.

<<<INSERT TABLE 5 HERE>>>

There are three significant predictors of the social benefits of events, which explain 21% of the variance in this outcome. Predictably, the ‘priority given to making the city more liveable’ has the highest positive impact on perceived social benefits (0.26). Moreover, both the ‘priority given to attracting tourists to the city’ (-0.33) and the 'perceived economic value in bidding for external events to host in the city' (-0.29) have negative impacts on the perceived social benefits.

In comparison with the multiple predictors for both perceived economic and social benefits from events, there is only one significant predictor of the perceived cultural benefits; nevertheless, it explains 22% of the variance in this outcome. Not surprisingly, this predictor is the ‘percentage of the annual event tourism programme developed by other public sector or arts organisations’. Notably, it has the highest

positive impact (0.49) of all the statistically significant predictors across the three types of benefits.

Variation in benefit predictors by city population size, event organisation type and event strategy/policy

The results from the tests for differences in the perceived benefits of events, and their statistically significant predictors, based on the population size of each city, type of events organisation, and the existence or otherwise of a current events strategy or policy are shown in Table 6. Interestingly, there are no statistically significant variations in the overall perceived economic, social or cultural benefits from events based on city population size, type of events organisation or the existence of an events strategy or policy. Moreover, there are no significant differences in the large majority of economic, social and cultural benefit predictor variables on the basis of city size or type of organisation. It is also notable that the existence or otherwise of an events policy or strategy in a city has no significant influence on any predictor variables.

<<<INSERT TABLE 6 ABOUT HERE>>>

By comparison, city population size is a significant moderator for one perceived social benefit predictor, while the respondents' organisation type is a significant moderator of one perceived social benefit predictor and two perceived economic benefit predictors. With increasing city size (from 50,000 -100,000 to 150,000 - 500,000), there is a large, statistically significant increase ($F = 2.69$; $p<0.05$; $eta^2 = 0.14$) in the influence of 'perceived economic value in bidding to host external events in the city' on perceived social benefits. Additionally, the impact of 'priority given to attracting tourists to the city' on both perceived social and economic benefits is significantly lower ($F = 3.14$; $p<0.05$; $eta^2 = 0.10$) for event bidding

organisations compared with regional, local or parish government organisations. By comparison, the perceived influence of the 'percentage of the annual event tourism programme developed by the local community' on perceived economic benefits is significantly higher ($F = 6.10$; $p<0.01$; $eta^2 = 0.16$) for event bidding organisations compared with regional, local or parish government organisations. However, given the relatively small numbers of respondents from some of the organisation types, the results are inconclusive.

Discussion

This study has examined the largely overlooked, smaller city perspectives of local government officials on perceived economic, social and cultural benefits gained from events. The viewpoints of smaller cities are worth understanding as existing studies have primarily focused on larger cities and mega-sized events. For example, previous research has suggested that smaller cities would benefit from a more strategic approach to events. However, our findings show that in smaller cities, the existence or otherwise of an events policy or strategy has no significant influence on the variables which are perceived to influence economic, social and cultural benefits in larger cities. This highlights key differences between large and smaller cities regarding perceived benefit predictors, which underlines the contribution of the research for both event tourism theory and management practice.

Economic benefits

While some of the key predictors of economic benefits from event tourism literature have been found to be significant for smaller cities, the large majority have not. As such, H1: 'The perceived predictors of economic benefits from events in large cities are also effective in the context of smaller cities', is not supported.

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The ‘priority given to attracting tourists to the city’ emerged as a significant positive perceived predictor of economic benefits. This supports Getz and Page’s (2016) framework, which underscores the economic advantages of leveraging tourism through strategically planned events. Dwyer et al. (2000) also highlight that well-marketed events can significantly enhance economic throughput by drawing tourists, reinforcing the importance of tourism in urban economic strategies.

Conversely, the ‘priority given to making the city more liveable’ showed a perceived negative impact on economic benefits by respondents. This finding suggests potential conflicts where economic objectives may overshadow broader urban quality-of-life considerations, which Mair and Whitford (2013) note as a common challenge in urban planning. This tension highlights a critical need for balanced economic growth and sustainable urban development strategies. While events are important to smaller cities, their inseparable relationship with the places which host them means that their use of outdoor urban public spaces creates a potential for discontent amongst local residents. The act of balancing opportunities for income generation, employment and improvements in infrastructure and services with the protection of resources and residents’ quality of life may result in tensions and disputes over who can make use of public space (McGillivray et al., 2022).

The latter is linked to the importance of the local community’s contribution to the event tourism programme which also has a significant perceived influence. This highlights the importance of community involvement with event creation for economic impact in smaller cities. This perhaps shows the value of a bottom-up approach to the development and implementation of events in this context, which supports Getz’s (2008) work. This positive impact of community involvement also underscores the significance of engaging local stakeholders in event planning, as noted by Richards

and Palmer (2010). This engagement not only fosters local support but can enhance economic impacts through increased participation and investment, supporting Whitford's (2009) assertion of the strategic role of DMOs in coordinating such strategies.

Additionally, the significant variable; 'percentage of the annual event tourism programme developed by the respondents' organisation/the DMO' further supports this, indicating that professional event management can effectively utilise local attractions and services to maximize economic benefits.

Social benefits

From the perspective of predicting the social benefits of event tourism, one positive and two negative predictor variables were found in the context of smaller cities. Therefore, H2: 'The perceived predictors of social benefits from events in large cities are also effective in the context of smaller cities' is not supported.

The 'priority given to attracting tourists to the city' and the 'perceived economic value in bidding to host external events' both negatively impacted perceived social benefits. These findings suggest managers perceive potential social alienation when economic-driven strategies are overly prioritised, as noted by Kim and Uysal (2003), who discuss the social costs associated with such strategies. Higgins-Desbiolles (2018) also highlighted potential community discontent when events are overly commercialised, which can lead to social fragmentation.

On the other hand, the 'priority given to making the city more liveable' had a positive impact on perceived social benefits. This aligns with Ziakas's (2013b) perspective on placemaking through events, suggesting that initiatives enhancing urban liveability resonate more with the community's social upliftment. This is further supported by Wood's (2017) findings that events contributing to the quality of life can

foster social cohesion and enhance community pride. These results underscore the importance of developing event strategies that not only aim for economic gains but also foster social wellbeing, highlighting the need for a balanced approach to urban event planning.

Cultural benefits

In comparison to the multiple predictors of the perceived economic and social benefits of events, there is only one significant predictor for the perceived cultural benefits of events in smaller cities. Therefore, H3: 'The perceived predictors of cultural benefits from events in large cities are also effective in the context of smaller cities' is not supported.

For cultural benefits, the sole significant predictor was the 'percentage of the annual event tourism programme developed by other public sector or arts organisations'. This finding emphasises the critical role these organisations play in ensuring that events not only entertain but also enrich the cultural landscape of smaller cities. Richards and Palmer (2010) discuss the importance of integrating cultural depth into urban events, a sentiment echoed by Mangion and McNabb (2005), who note that events are effective platforms for cultural expression and promote local culture, enhancing cultural understanding and pride among residents.

The involvement of arts organisations ensures the maintenance of cultural authenticity in event programming, which de Grosbois (2009) highlights as essential for fostering a strong cultural identity. This strategic collaboration between city planners and cultural institutions, as advocated by Quinn (2010), is crucial for maximizing the cultural dividends of events, particularly in smaller cities where cultural resources might be limited yet highly impactful.

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Overall, the results show that a relatively smaller number of predictor variables have a significant impact on the perceived economic, social and cultural benefits from events in smaller cities compared with the range of potential predictors identified in previous research in large cities. This suggests that supply-side perceptions relating to what actions to take and why, based on priorities and the perceived value of events, who should develop the events and how they should be created are perhaps even more critical given the inadequacy of resources in a smaller city context.

Additionally, while most of the predictors of perceived economic, social and cultural benefits were not significantly differentiated based on city size, the latter was influential in relation to the impact of perceived economic value in bidding to host external events on perceived social benefits. Similarly, while there was general agreement across different types of organisations in smaller cities about the influence of the predictors on benefits, there was some significant variation regarding the impact of certain priorities and contributions on economic and social benefits. There was significant variation across different types of organisations about the priority of attracting tourists to smaller cities in relation to economic and social benefits, and regarding the contribution of the local community in smaller cities in relation to economic benefits.

It is interesting that only 28% of respondents reported that 75-100% of their role is allocated to events, while 34% reported an allocation of less than 25% and only 46% have an event policy or strategy. Moreover, there were no statistically significant variations in the perceived economic, social and cultural benefits from events or in relation to the large majority of predictor variables based on city population size, type of events organisation or the existence or otherwise of an

events policy or strategy. This is an important finding, which indicates that the results are generally applicable across the sample despite variations in city size or organisation characteristics and whether an events tourism policy/strategy is in place. This perhaps suggests that policies and strategies could be improved, that organisations are under resourced and/or that external factors conspire against strategy implementation. The difficulties in maintaining a strategic approach to events, can relate to a wide range of interrelated factors including the political process, product innovation, stakeholder engagement, network development, event selection, and effective distribution to target specific markets (Ormerod & Wood, 2021).

The general applicability of the results notwithstanding, it should be noted that the findings highlight that when the place population size increases above 150,000, there is a significant increase in the perceived economic value in bidding for events. This indicates that this population size represents a critical mass for these impacts, which suggests larger places have an advantage regarding these benefits.

Conclusions

Following a prolonged period of austerity and the COVID-19 pandemic, this research makes a timely contribution to theory and management practice in the field of event tourism within the specific context of smaller cities in the UK. While previous research has focussed on large cities and case study approaches, this study's multi-destination perspective responds to the call to widen research into event impacts and addresses the gap in understanding about event outcomes in smaller places with significant resource constraints (Wood, 2017).

The importance of a strategic approach to events for destination marketing supports the findings from previous research (Schofield et al., 2018). Moreover,

events are highly valued as economic attractions (Getz, 2008) and often used in place marketing to add uniqueness or enhance the visitor experience (Truong et al., 2018) and because of their longer-term legacy from media exposure (Hede, 2005).

Economically, the study confirmed that certain strategies effective in larger cities, such as prioritising tourist attraction (Getz & Page, 2016) and engaging community involvement (Richards & Palmer, 2010), are also beneficial in smaller cities. These strategies not only help in maximising tourist influx and economic throughput but also ensure that the benefits are sustainable by fostering local participation and investment. However, contrary to expectations set by larger city models, prioritising the liveability of the city was found to have a negative impact on economic outcomes (Mair & Whitford, 2013), suggesting a potential conflict between developing tourist-centric events and maintaining quality of life for local residents.

Socially, the results indicated that the successful transfer of large-city strategies to smaller cities is more complex. The negative impacts of strategies focused exclusively on economic returns, such as prioritising tourism and economic valuation in event bidding, suggest that these can lead to social alienation if not carefully balanced with community-centric approaches (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2018; Kim & Uysal, 2003). Conversely, enhancing urban liveability emerged as a beneficial strategy, reinforcing the importance of integrating event tourism within broader social and urban development goals to foster community cohesion and enhance social capital (Wood, 2017).

Culturally, the study highlighted the pivotal role of public sector and arts organisations in developing event programmes that yield cultural benefits (Richards & Palmer, 2010; Mangion & McNabb, 2005). This finding supports the literature emphasising the necessity of maintaining cultural integrity through event

programming and underscores the value of strategic collaborations between city planners and cultural institutions to cultivate a vibrant cultural scene that resonates with both residents and visitors (de Grosbois, 2009).

Overall, this research contributes to the field by providing empirical evidence that while some strategies for event tourism development are universally applicable, others need significant adaptation to align with the local context of smaller cities. This underscores the necessity for DMOs and city planners to tailor event tourism strategies that not only draw tourists but also benefit the local community economically, socially, and culturally. Moreover, it highlights the importance of a strategic approach that balances economic objectives with enhancing the quality of life and cultural richness, ensuring that event tourism acts as a catalyst for sustainable urban development (Ziakas, 2013a).

Limitations and Future Research

Given the difficulties of securing a representative number of local government and BID members with responsibility for, or association with, their city event programme, the study sample size is a constraint on the generalisation of the findings. Moreover, while the sub-samples for the cities with a population between 10,000 and 500,000 were adequate, those below 10,000 and above 500,000 were relatively small. As such, the results are less representative of these places. A larger sample is therefore required in future research to examine the event tourism strategies in these locations. The relatively low proportion of variance in the economic, social and cultural benefits explained by the predictors should also be noted.

Further research should explore wider reasoning behind these predictors in a smaller city context. This could involve exploring how successful smaller cities have operationalised some of the predictors found here.

In addition, the data collection took place before the COVID-19 pandemic. For this reason, the outcomes should be viewed in the context of post-COVID constraints on events tourism development. The final limiting factor is that only local governments were surveyed. Future studies should therefore examine event tourism from the perspective of other stakeholders to yield a clearer understanding of the benefits gained throughout event networks. Further research should also investigate the differences in economic, social and cultural outcomes in relation to who organises events, using qualitative data from key stakeholders across networks.

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Table 1: Literature on operationalising event tourism policy

Strategic planning antecedents of Event Tourism		Supporting Literature
Is there an event strategy or policy in place?	• Yes • No	(Foley et al., 2012; Getz, 2013; Turok, 2008; Whitford, 2009)
Who plans or creates the events?	• Local or regional government • Local Community • Local Businesses • Other public sector or arts organisations • Corporate or commercial operators	(Christou, 2017; Hanrahan & Maguire, 2016; Maguire, 2019; Mitchell et al.,1997; Richards & Duif, 2019; Todd et al., 2017; Van Niekerk, 2014; Wallace & Michopoulou, 2019)
How are events created?	• Bidding for events • Research-lead • Sharing research with stakeholders • Encouraging the local community and/or local businesses.	(Antchak, 2017; Christou, 2017; Cowell, 2004; Getz & Page, 2016; Van Niekerk, 2014; Xing et al., 2008; Ziakas, 2019)

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Table 2: Operationalising variables from the literature

Predictor variables from the literature	Supporting Literature		Response Set
Events can attract tourists (and others, such as sponsors and the media) who otherwise might not visit a particular place; the spending of event tourists generates economic benefits; event tourism can be leveraged for maximum value in combatting seasonality of demand, spreading tourism geographically, and assisting in other forms of urban and economic development; portfolios of events can be designed for maximum impact, especially by appealing to multiple target segments.	(Getz & Page, 2016)	**Q: Why do you run events in your town or city: To attract tourists to our town or city.**	5-point Likert scale (Strongly disagree to Strongly Agree)
Events can create positive images for the destination and help brand or re-position cities.	(Getz & Page, 2016)	**Q: Why do you run events in your town or city: To create positive images or help with branding our town or city**	5-point Likert scale (Strongly disagree to Strongly Agree)
Events contribute to place marketing by making cities more liveable and attractive.	(Getz & Page, 2016)	**Q: Why do you run events in your town or city: To make our town or city more liveable/attractive.**	5-point Likert scale (Strongly disagree to Strongly Agree)
Events animate cities, resorts, parks, urban spaces and venues of all kinds, making them more attractive to visit and re-visit, and utilising them more efficiently.	(Getz & Page, 2016)	**Q: Why do you run events in your town or city: To animate spaces in our town or city.**	5-point Likert scale (Strongly disagree to Strongly Agree)
Event tourism acts as a catalyst for other forms of desired development (including urban renewal, community capacity building, voluntarism and improved marketing), thereby generating a long-term or permanent legacy.	(Getz & Page, 2016)	**Q: Why do you run events in your town or city: To act as a catalyst for other forms of desired development (e.g., urban renewal)**	5-point Likert scale (Strongly disagree to Strongly Agree)
Is there an event strategy or policy in place?	(Foley et al., 2012; Getz, 2013; Turok, 2008; Whitford, 2009)	**Q: Is there a current strategy or policy for events in your town or city?** *(choose the most appropriate)*	Yes / No / Unsure

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Who plans or creates the events?	(Christou, 2017; Hanrahan & Maguire, 2016; Maguire, 2019; Mitchell et al., 1997; Richards & Duif, 2019; Todd et al., 2017; Van Niekerk, 2014; Wallace & Michopoulou, 2019)	**Q: What percentage of your annual event tourism programme is developed by:** **1. Local or regional government** **2. Local Community** **3. Local Businesses** **4. Other public sector or arts organisations** 5. **Corporate or commercial operators**	Sliding scale 0-100% for each, total must not exceed 100%.
How are events created?	(Antchak, 2017; Christou, 2017; Cowell, 2004; Getz & Page, 2016; Van Niekerk, 2014; Xing et al., 2008; Ziakas, 2019)	**Q: Does your town or city engage in bidding for any one-off events? (e.g. sports events)** **Q: How often do you undertake market research when planning any event?** **Q: Is any market research shared amongst stakeholders who might use it to help create relevant events?** **Q: Do you encourage event competitors to collaborate for the benefit of the event tourism offer as a whole?** **Q: Do you actively encourage your network (i.e., community and/or local businesses) to create and run their own events?**	Yes / No / Unsure 5-point Likert scale (Never to Always) 5-point Likert scale (Never to Always) 5-point Likert scale (Never to Always) 5-point Likert scale (Never to Always)

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Table 3. Dependent and predictor variables with descriptive statistics

Independent Variables	$\bar{x}$	σ	σ_M
Priority given to attracting tourists to the city	4.25	1.02	0.10
Priority given to creating positive images or to branding the city	4.50	0.94	0.09
Priority given to making the city more liveable	4.51	0.90	0.09
Priority given to animating spaces in the city	4.33	0.79	0.08
Priority given to using events as a catalyst for other forms of desired development (e.g. urban renewal)	3.84	0.90	0.09
Frequency of undertaking market research when planning any event	2.53	1.08	0.11
Frequency of sharing market research amongst stakeholders for the purpose of creating relevant events	2.52	1.21	0.12
Frequency of engaging in bidding for any one-off events	2.11	1.12	0.11
Perceived economic value in bidding to host external events in the city	2.73	1.37	0.13
Level of encouragement given to the community and/or local businesses to create and run their own events	3.29	1.13	0.11
Perceived importance of encouraging event competitors to collaborate for the benefit of your event tourism offer	2.63	1.32	0.15
Perceived importance of encouraging collaboration between stakeholders to improve events marketing/promotion	1.41	0.65	0.07
Perceived importance of engaging with high-profile local stakeholders to promote the event tourism offer	3.23	1.08	0.12
Perceived importance of encouraging local relationship building by using technology platforms	3.54	1.05	0.12
Perceived importance of encouraging economies of scale from suppliers i.e., supplying multiple events)	4.19	1.09	0.12
Percentage of the annual event tourism programme developed by the local community	16.72	17.80	1.76
Percentage of the annual event tourism programme developed by local businesses	13.66	12.22	1.20
Percentage of the annual event tourism programme developed by the respondent's organisation/the DMO	42.21	25.88	2.55
Percentage of the annual event tourism programme developed by other public sector or arts organisations	19.04	18.50	1.82
Percentage of the annual event tourism programme developed by corporate or commercial operators	8.37	14.25	1.40
Dependent Variables			
Percentage of economic benefits for all events	45.63	21.40	2.05
Percentage of social benefits for all events	32.64	16.47	1.58
Percentage of cultural benefits for all event	21.72	14.05	1.35

Notes: $\bar{x}$: mean; σ: standard deviation; σM: standard error of the mean. The first 15 independent variables were rated on 5-point Likert-type scales. Figures for the 'percentage' variables (five independent variables and three dependent variables) represent $\bar{x}$, σ and σM percentages from a constant sum (100 points) question.

Table 4: Sample characteristics

Variables	Frequency	%
Population		
0-9,999 people	5	4.50
10,000-24,999 people	14	12.61
25,000-49,999 people	23	20.72
50,000-99,999 people	20	18.02
100,000-149,999 people	23	20.72
150,000-499,999 people	19	17.12
500,000+ people	7	6.31
Total	111	100
Type of organisation		
Business Improvement District	45	40.54
Regional, Local or Parish Government	58	52.25
Destination Marketing Organisation	3	2.70
Event Bidding Organisation	2	1.80
Other (Please state)	3	2.70
Total	111	100
Role of event lead		
Volunteer (unpaid)	2	1.80
Part time (paid)	29	26.13
Full time (paid)	80	72.07
Total	111	100
Event lead time re: events		
0-24%	34	30.63
25-49%	20	18.02
50-74%	26	23.42
75-100%	31	27.93
Total	111	100
Event strategy/policy		
Yes	51	45.95
No	43	38.74
Not sure	17	15.32
Total	111	100

Table 5. Perceived predictors of economic, social and cultural benefits of events

Outcomes/Predictor Variables	Beta[1]	*t*	Tolerance	VIF
1. Perceived Economic Benefits: Adjusted R^2 = 0.27; F = 6.73; *df* = 5; *p* <0.001				
1a) Priority given to attracting tourists to the city	0.35	3.53***	0.82	1.21
1b) Priority given to making the city more liveable	-0.32	-3.19***	0.82	1.23
1c) Percentage of the annual event tourism programme developed by the local community	0.29	2.80**	0.76	1.31
1d) Percentage of the annual event tourism programme developed by the respondents' organisation/the DMO	0.25	2.44**	0.77	1.30
1e) Level of encouragement given to the community and/or local businesses to create and run their own events	0.19	2.11*	0.95	1.05
2. Perceived Social Benefits: Adjusted R^2 = 0.21; F = 8.39; *df* = 3; *p* <0.001				
2a) Priority given to attracting tourists to the city	-0.33	-3.30***	0.84	1.19
2b) Perceived economic value in bidding to host external events in the city	-0.29	-3.19***	0.99	1.01
2c) Priority given to making the city more liveable	0.26	2.58**	0.84	1.18
3. Perceived Cultural Benefits: Adjusted R^2 = 0.22; F = 31.79; *df* = 1; *p* <0.001				
3a) Percentage of the annual event tourism programme developed by other public sector or arts organisations	0.49	5.64	1.00	1.00

Notes: 1: standardised beta; * significant at the $p < 0.05$ level; ** significant at the $p < 0.01$ level; *** significant at the $p < 0.001$ level;

Durbin-Watson statistics (Model 1: 1.90; Model 2: 2.01; Model 3: 1.96) indicate that the assumption of independent errors is tenable in all three models.

Model 1 - Mahalanobis distance (MD): maximum = 14.84 (< critical value of 20.52); $\bar{x}$ = 4.94; σ = 2.82. Cook's distance (CD): maximum: 0.33 (<1); $\bar{x}$ = 0.05; σ = 0.05.

Model 2 - MD: maximum = 8.37 (< critical value of 16.27); $\bar{x}$ = 2.97; σ = 1.82; CD: maximum: 0.39 (<1); $\bar{x}$ = 0.01; σ = 0.05.

Model 3 - MD: maximum = 10.82 (< critical value of 13.82); $\bar{x}$ = 0.99; σ = 1.51; CD: maximum: 0.16 (<1); $\bar{x}$ = 0.01; σ = 0.01.

VIF values, tolerance statistics and predictor variance dimension loadings indicate the absence of collinearity in the data.

Table 6: Variation in benefit predictors by city size, event organisation type and event strategy/policy

Outcomes/Predictor Variables	City Size[1] *F*	Type of Organisation[2] *F*	Event Strategy[3] *t*
1. Perceived Economic Benefits	0.61^{ns}	0.83^{ns}	1.18^{ns}
1a) Priority given to attracting tourists to the city	0.96^{ns}	3.14*	0.83^{ns}
1b) Priority given to making the city more liveable	0.86^{ns}	1.98^{ns}	1.16^{ns}
1c) Percentage of the annual event tourism programme developed by the local community	1.45^{ns}	6.11**	0.69^{ns}
1d) Percentage of the annual event tourism programme developed by the respondent's organisation/ the DMO	0.87^{ns}	1.11^{ns}	0.06^{ns}
1e) Level of encouragement given to the community and/or local businesses to create and run their own events	0.41^{ns}	0.42^{ns}	1.24^{ns}
2. Perceived Social Benefits	0.41^{ns}	0.46^{ns}	1.02^{ns}
2a) Priority given to attracting tourists to the city	0.96^{ns}	3.14*	0.83^{ns}
2b) Perceived economic value in bidding to host external events in the city	2.69*	0.62^{ns}	0.71^{ns}
2c) Priority given to making the city more liveable	0.86^{ns}	1.98^{ns}	1.16^{ns}
3. Perceived Cultural Benefits	1.45^{ns}	1.94^{ns}	0.60^{ns}
3a) Percentage of the annual event tourism programme developed by other public sector or arts organisations	1.63^{ns}	2.22^{ns}	0.68^{ns}

Notes: Figures represent *t* or *F* values from independent samples t-tests or one-way ANOVA tests with Games-Howell multiple comparison procedures;

ns: non-significant; *: significant at the $p < 0.05$ level; **: significant at the $p < 0.01$ level; ***: significant at the $p < 0.001$ level.

Moderators: 1. City population size; 2. Respondents' organisation type; 3. Existence of an event strategy/policy;