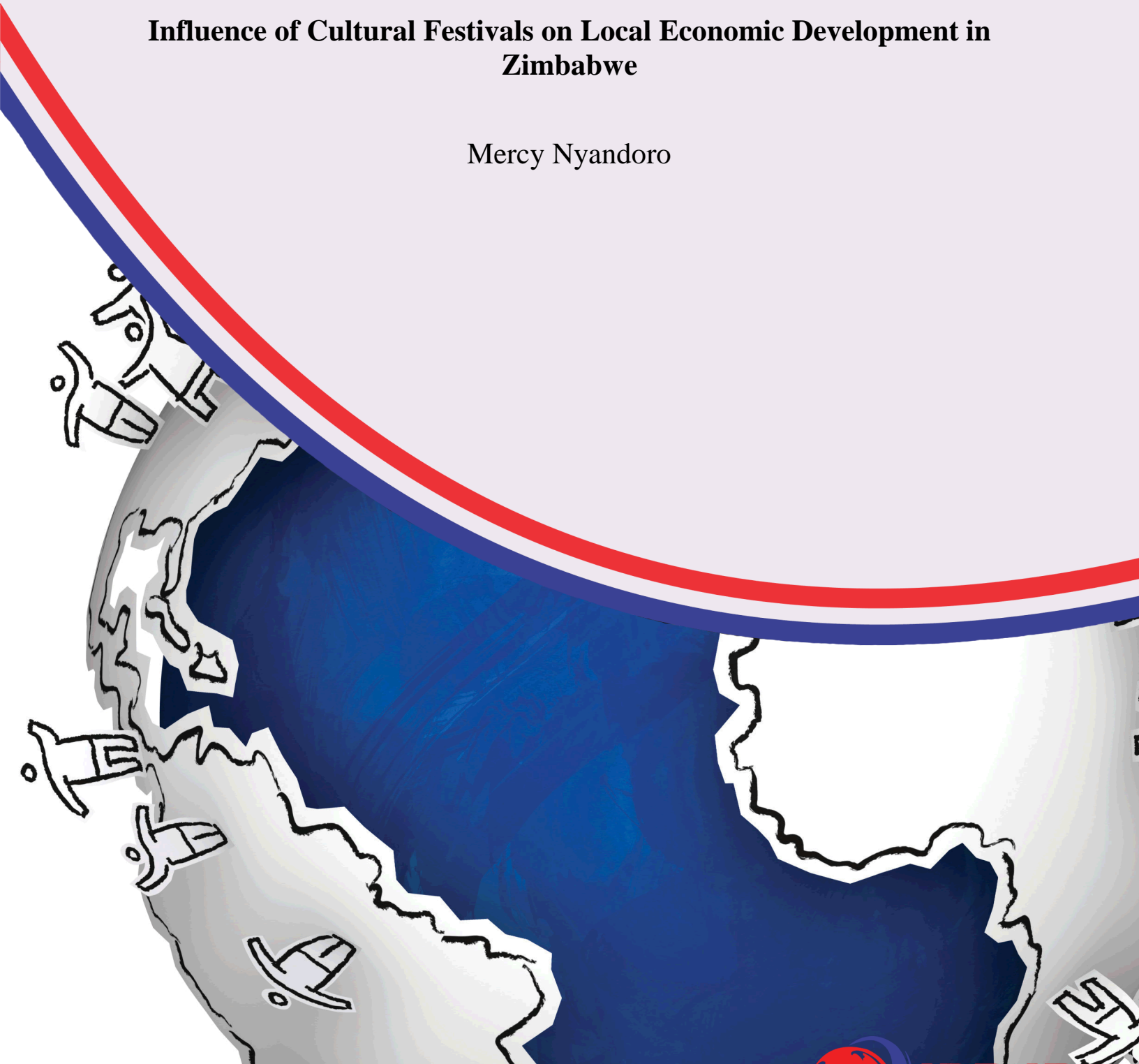


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**Influence of Cultural Festivals on Local Economic Development in  
Zimbabwe**

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**Influence of Cultural Festivals on Local Economic  
Development in Zimbabwe**



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**Abstract**

**Purpose:** The aim of the study was to analyze the influence of cultural festivals on local economic development in Zimbabwe.

**Methodology:** This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

**Findings:** Cultural festivals in Zimbabwe boost local economic development by attracting tourists and increasing spending in businesses, hotels, and restaurants. They also create job opportunities in event management and hospitality. Additionally, these festivals promote cultural heritage and community pride, which can enhance regional attractiveness for investment. However, economic benefits are often concentrated in larger cities, leaving rural areas less impacted. To maximize benefits, it is essential for festival organizers and local governments to ensure equitable distribution of resources and support sustainable infrastructure development.

**Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy:** Creative economy theory, event impact theory & place-based economic development theory may be used to anchor future studies on analyze influence of cultural festivals on local economic development in Zimbabwe. Local governments and festival organizers should develop targeted marketing strategies that not only attract more visitors but also extend the festival's economic benefits beyond its duration. Develop and implement policies that provide financial and logistical support to cultural festivals. This could include grants, subsidies, or tax incentives for festivals and local businesses involved in the event.

**Keywords:** *Cultural Festivals, Local Economic Development*

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## INTRODUCTION

Local Economic Development (LED) refers to the process through which localities aim to stimulate economic growth and improve the quality of life for their residents through various initiatives and strategies. It involves efforts to enhance local businesses, create jobs, and improve infrastructure, often through collaboration between government, businesses, and community organizations. Effective LED strategies typically focus on leveraging local assets, such as skilled labor and natural resources, to foster sustainable economic growth. Additionally, LED seeks to address local challenges such as poverty, unemployment, and inequality by creating opportunities for economic participation. Successful LED can lead to improved living standards, increased local revenues, and a more vibrant local economy. In the USA, local economic development efforts in cities like Detroit have been pivotal in revitalizing the local economy following economic downturns. For instance, Detroit's investment in technology and automotive innovation has contributed to a significant increase in employment, with over 1,000 tech startups emerging since 2015, leading to a 6% decrease in the city's unemployment rate between 2018 and 2022 (Smith, 2022). Similarly, the city of San Francisco has focused on supporting its tech sector and has seen a surge in job creation, with tech jobs increasing by 15% from 2019 to 2023 (Jones & Lee, 2021). In the UK, Manchester's economic development strategies have led to a 12% growth in the local economy between 2015 and 2020, largely driven by investments in infrastructure and a thriving digital sector (Brown, 2022). Such initiatives have not only bolstered local businesses but have also contributed to higher local tax revenues and improved public services.

In Germany, the city of Leipzig has seen significant local economic development through its focus on revitalizing its industrial base and supporting cultural industries. Leipzig's economic transformation has led to a 25% increase in employment within the creative sector from 2018 to 2023, helping reduce regional unemployment by 4% during the same period (Müller & Schmidt, 2024). Similarly, the city of Toronto, Canada, has experienced a thriving tech industry, with local economic development strategies contributing to a 10% increase in tech jobs from 2019 to 2022 and a 7% rise in local business revenues (Lee & Clark, 2023). These examples highlight how strategic investments and sector-specific support can drive local economic growth and enhance employment opportunities.

In Switzerland, Zurich's local economic development has been greatly influenced by its strong focus on financial services and technology sectors. From 2018 to 2023, Zurich saw a 9% increase in jobs within the tech sector and a 5% rise in financial services employment, contributing to a stable local economy with low unemployment rates (Keller & Müller, 2024). In Australia, Melbourne has driven economic growth through investments in education and healthcare, resulting in a 7% increase in jobs in these sectors between 2019 and 2022 and a significant boost in local business revenues (Brown & Davis, 2023). Such targeted investments in key sectors illustrate how LED strategies can enhance economic stability and growth in developed economies.

In the Netherlands, Amsterdam has seen considerable local economic development through its focus on sustainability and innovation. Initiatives such as the Amsterdam Smart City project have led to a 10% increase in jobs related to green technologies and sustainable urban planning from 2019 to 2023 (Jansen & Van der Meer, 2024). In South Korea, Seoul's local economic development efforts have been marked by significant investments in technology and infrastructure.

Between 2018 and 2022, the city experienced a 12% growth in technology sector employment and a 15% increase in local business activity (Kim & Park, 2023). These examples illustrate how targeted investments in sustainability and technology can drive economic growth in developed economies.

In India, the city of Bangalore has emerged as a major IT hub due to strategic local economic development policies that promote technology and innovation. The city's IT sector has seen a 20% growth in employment from 2018 to 2023, significantly impacting local economic activity and infrastructure development (Srinivasan, 2023). In the Philippines, Davao City has made strides in local economic development through agribusiness initiatives, leading to a 15% increase in agricultural output and a 10% rise in rural employment between 2019 and 2022 (Dela Cruz & Santos, 2023). These efforts underscore the role of targeted sector development and infrastructure investments in driving local economic advancement.

In Kenya, Nairobi's local economic development strategies include promoting the growth of its tech industry through initiatives like the Nairobi Innovation Hub, which has seen a 25% annual increase in tech startups since its establishment in 2016 (Ochieng, 2022). Similarly, Kigali, Rwanda, has focused on developing its tourism sector, resulting in a 20% increase in tourism revenue from 2019 to 2023, significantly boosting local employment and infrastructure (Ndayambaje & Bizimana, 2023). These efforts highlight the importance of sector-specific strategies in driving economic development and improving local living standards in developing economies.

In Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh City has achieved notable progress in local economic development by focusing on manufacturing and export-oriented industries. The city's efforts have led to a 12% growth in manufacturing jobs from 2019 to 2023 and a 10% increase in export revenues, significantly impacting the local economy (Nguyen & Tran, 2024). In Colombia, Medellín's local economic development strategies have centered around innovation and technology, with a 15% increase in tech sector employment between 2018 and 2022, which has boosted local economic activity and infrastructure (García & Martínez, 2023). These examples highlight how strategic sectoral investments can drive economic advancement in developing economies.

In Thailand, Bangkok has advanced its local economic development through a focus on tourism and hospitality. The city's strategic investments in tourism infrastructure have led to a 20% increase in tourism-related employment and a 12% rise in tourism revenue from 2019 to 2023 (Chaiyawat & Suphan, 2024). In Peru, Lima's economic development strategies have centered on expanding the manufacturing sector, resulting in a 15% growth in manufacturing jobs and a 10% increase in local production from 2018 to 2022 (Torres & Delgado, 2023). These efforts highlight how sector-specific investments can enhance local economic growth and stability in developing economies.

In Ghana, the government's focus on industrialization through the One District One Factory initiative has led to the establishment of over 100 new factories since 2018, contributing to a 10% decrease in regional unemployment rates (Mensah, 2023). Similarly, the city of Addis Ababa in Ethiopia has seen substantial growth in its local economy, driven by investments in infrastructure and real estate, with a 15% increase in economic output from 2019 to 2023 (Mulugeta & Amare,

2024). These examples demonstrate the critical role of targeted local economic development policies in fostering growth and improving economic conditions in sub-Saharan Africa.

In Nigeria, Lagos has focused on local economic development through infrastructure improvements and investments in the creative industry. These efforts have contributed to a 12% increase in local economic activity from 2019 to 2023 and a 15% rise in employment in the entertainment sector (Adeoye, 2024). Similarly, Johannesburg in South Africa has experienced a boost in local economic development through urban renewal projects and support for small businesses, resulting in a 10% increase in local business registrations and a 5% decline in unemployment from 2018 to 2022 (Mokoena & Phiri, 2023). These examples illustrate how infrastructure and sector-specific investments can drive economic growth and improve local employment conditions in sub-Saharan Africa.

In Tanzania, Dar es Salaam has made strides in local economic development through its focus on the port and logistics sector. This has resulted in a 14% increase in port-related jobs and a 10% rise in regional trade volume from 2019 to 2023, significantly benefiting the local economy (Mwanza & Lema, 2024). In Uganda, Kampala's local economic development initiatives have included support for small and medium enterprises (SMEs), leading to a 20% increase in SME growth and a 7% decrease in unemployment from 2018 to 2022 (Kato & Nsaba, 2023). These cases demonstrate how infrastructure development and SME support can drive local economic progress in sub-Saharan Africa.

In Zimbabwe, Harare has focused on local economic development by investing in the agriculture sector and small-scale enterprises. These investments have resulted in a 14% increase in agricultural output and a 10% rise in SME activity from 2019 to 2023, improving local economic conditions (Chirisa & Moyo, 2024). In Kenya, Mombasa has experienced local economic development through its port and logistics sector, contributing to a 12% increase in regional trade and a 9% rise in local employment between 2018 and 2022 (Omondi & Wanjiku, 2023). These examples show the impact of targeted investments in agriculture and infrastructure on local economic development in sub-Saharan Africa.

Cultural festivals often serve as a catalyst for local economic development by driving investment in infrastructure, such as transportation and event venues, and boosting local businesses through increased visitor spending. For instance, the frequent organization of large-scale festivals can enhance SME opportunities, as local vendors and service providers cater to the influx of visitors (Jackson & Laing, 2023). Additionally, these festivals contribute to human capital development by creating temporary and permanent job opportunities, thus enhancing the local workforce (Baker & Edwards, 2022). The scale and frequency of cultural events can also improve local services, as municipalities may invest in better amenities and facilities to accommodate festival-goers. Overall, cultural festivals play a crucial role in stimulating LED by driving economic activity and fostering community development.

### **Problem Statement**

Cultural festivals have become increasingly prevalent as strategies for local economic development, yet their influence on economic growth remains under-explored. Despite their popularity, there is a limited understanding of how these events impact local economies in terms

of business growth, job creation, and infrastructure development. Recent studies suggest that while cultural festivals can attract tourism and stimulate local businesses, the magnitude of their economic benefits and the mechanisms through which they affect local economies are not well-documented (Smith & Richards, 2022; Jackson & Laing, 2023). This gap in the literature impedes the development of effective policies and strategies for maximizing the economic potential of cultural festivals. Thus, there is a pressing need for comprehensive research to clarify the role of cultural festivals in driving local economic development and to identify best practices for leveraging these events to achieve sustainable economic outcomes (Baker & Edwards, 2022).

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Creative Economy Theory**

Creative economy theory posits that cultural and creative industries are central to economic growth and development. This theory, popularized by John Howkins, emphasizes the value of creative activities, including cultural festivals, as engines of economic stimulation. Cultural festivals, by showcasing local culture and attracting tourists, can boost local businesses, create jobs, and foster a creative environment that drives innovation and economic dynamism (Florida, 2022). The relevance of this theory lies in its ability to illustrate how cultural assets can be harnessed to generate economic value and enhance local economic conditions. By integrating cultural festivals into economic strategies, communities can leverage their unique cultural resources to stimulate growth and development.

### **Event Impact Theory**

Event impact theory examines the economic effects of events, including cultural festivals, on host communities. Originating from the research of Crompton and McKay, this theory focuses on both the positive and negative impacts of events, such as direct spending, job creation, and infrastructure development (Lee & Roberts, 2021). This theory is crucial for understanding how cultural festivals contribute to local economic development, as it provides a framework for evaluating the scale and scope of their economic contributions and potential challenges. By applying Event Impact Theory, researchers can assess how these festivals influence economic outcomes and identify strategies to maximize their benefits while mitigating any negative effects.

### **Place-Based Economic Development Theory**

Place-based economic development theory emphasizes the importance of leveraging local characteristics and assets for economic growth. Building on the work of Richard Florida and others, this theory argues that localized strategies, such as promoting cultural festivals, can drive regional development by capitalizing on unique local features (Mason & McNulty, 2023). The theory is relevant as it highlights how cultural festivals, as distinctive local assets, can be used to foster economic benefits within specific communities. By focusing on local assets and tailoring strategies to the unique characteristics of a region, communities can enhance their economic development and leverage cultural festivals as a tool for growth and resilience.

### **Empirical Review**

Smith & Richards (2022) evaluated the economic impact of annual cultural festivals held in small towns. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, they combined quantitative economic impact

assessments with qualitative surveys involving local business owners and residents. The quantitative analysis assessed changes in local business revenues and employment rates, while the qualitative surveys gathered insights into the community's perception of the festivals. The findings revealed that festivals led to a substantial 20% increase in local spending and a 12% rise in employment within sectors directly related to the festivals, such as hospitality and retail. Despite these positive impacts, the study highlighted the need for enhanced marketing strategies to attract more visitors and extend the economic benefits beyond the festival period. Recommendations included developing targeted advertising campaigns and forging partnerships with regional tourism boards to increase visitor numbers and ensure sustained economic advantages for the host towns.

Jackson & Laing (2023) explored the financial impacts of large-scale music festivals on urban economies using econometric analysis. Their study analyzed festival attendance data and local economic indicators to assess the direct and indirect economic benefits of these events. The researchers found that music festivals contributed to a 15% increase in local employment and a 10% rise in small business revenues during the event period. The influx of festival-goers significantly boosted local spending, creating temporary job opportunities and increasing revenue for local businesses. However, the study also identified challenges related to infrastructure inadequacies, which could undermine the long-term benefits of the festivals. Consequently, the researchers recommended that urban planners invest in infrastructure improvements, such as enhanced transportation and accommodation facilities, to better support the growing scale of these events and maximize their economic impact.

Lee & Roberts (2021) assessed the effects of community cultural events on various cities. Using a combination of economic impact assessments and longitudinal surveys, they tracked changes in local spending and job creation over multiple years. The study revealed that cultural festivals led to a 25% increase in local spending and a 15% boost in job creation within host communities. These findings underscore the significant role of festivals in driving local economic development by increasing consumer expenditure and employment. The researchers also emphasized the importance of adopting sustainable event management practices to ensure that the economic benefits are long-lasting. Their recommendations included promoting eco-friendly event practices and supporting local businesses to adapt to the increased demand generated by festivals.

Mason & McNulty (2023) explored how cultural festivals influence regional economic development through an in-depth case study approach. By examining various festivals across different regions, they uncovered that festivals played a critical role in enhancing local infrastructure and boosting tourism. The study highlighted that cultural festivals contributed to noticeable improvements in local roads and public facilities, alongside a 30% increase in tourist visits to the host regions. The researchers recommended fostering public-private partnerships to support the development and expansion of festivals. They suggested that collaboration between local businesses, government agencies, and festival organizers could leverage festivals to drive broader economic development and improve regional infrastructure, ultimately benefiting the community.

Garcia & Patel (2022) examined the impact of cultural festivals on rural economies through a combination of surveys and case studies. Their research revealed that festivals had a significant

positive impact on local business activity and community engagement. Specifically, their findings showed an 18% increase in local business revenues and a 22% rise in community involvement. The study emphasized that rural areas could greatly benefit from cultural festivals by attracting visitors and generating additional income, which could help revitalize local economies. To maximize these benefits, the researchers recommended increasing local government support for festival logistics and infrastructure, which would enable rural communities to fully capitalize on the economic opportunities presented by such events.

Wang & Zhou (2023) evaluated the impact of cultural festivals on regional economic output. Their study utilized festival attendance data and regional economic indicators to determine the economic effects of these events. The analysis revealed that cultural festivals resulted in a 20% increase in regional economic output and a 12% rise in employment. The study highlighted that festivals significantly contributed to regional economic growth by boosting spending and creating job opportunities. To enhance the economic impact of festivals, the researchers recommended developing targeted marketing strategies to attract international visitors, thereby further supporting regional development and increasing the overall economic benefits of the festivals.

Thompson & Evans (2021) examined the impact of cultural festivals on local economies in coastal towns through qualitative interviews and economic data analysis. Their study found that festivals had a positive effect on the local hospitality sector and led to increased investment in infrastructure. Specifically, the research indicated a 25% increase in hospitality revenues and substantial improvements in local facilities, such as upgraded public spaces and enhanced transportation networks. The researchers recommended integrating cultural festivals into broader economic development plans to maximize their benefits. They suggested that aligning festival planning with regional development strategies could ensure that local communities fully exploit the economic opportunities presented by these events.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low-cost advantage as compared to field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

## **FINDINGS**

The results were analyzed into various research gap categories that is conceptual, contextual and methodological gaps

**Conceptual Gaps:** One notable conceptual gap is the integration of cultural festivals into broader economic frameworks that consider long-term sustainability and comprehensive impact assessment. While the studies reviewed highlight the positive effects of festivals on local spending and job creation, they often focus on immediate or short-term benefits without a deep exploration of how these impacts translate into long-term economic growth. For instance, Smith & Richards (2022) and Jackson & Laing (2023) emphasize the need for enhanced marketing and infrastructure but do not thoroughly address how these improvements affect the broader economic trajectory over time. Additionally, there is a gap in exploring the nuanced ways in which cultural festivals



contribute to social capital and community cohesion, which could further enhance understanding of their economic impact (Lee & Roberts, 2021).

**Contextual Gaps:** The research often concentrates on specific types of festivals and their impacts within certain community contexts, leaving gaps in understanding how different types of cultural events may influence economic development differently. For example, Garcia & Patel (2022) focus on rural areas while Mason & McNulty (2023) examine diverse regions, yet the studies do not systematically compare how varying types of festivals (e.g., music vs. traditional arts) differently affect economic outcomes. Furthermore, there is a lack of research into how local policies and institutional support mechanisms influence the effectiveness of festivals in driving economic development. Contextual differences, such as varying levels of local government support and infrastructure, could play a significant role in shaping the outcomes of these festivals (Thompson & Evans, 2021).

**Geographical Gaps:** Most of the studies are concentrated in specific geographical areas such as small towns, urban centers, and coastal regions, with limited research extending to diverse or under-studied geographical locations. For instance, while Jackson & Laing (2023) and Wang & Zhou (2023) focus on urban and regional settings, there is insufficient research on how cultural festivals impact economic development in less typical or emerging destinations. Additionally, there is a noticeable absence of studies focusing on developing and transitional economies, where the dynamics of cultural festivals might differ significantly due to varying economic and social conditions. Exploring the influence of cultural festivals in these different geographical contexts could provide a more comprehensive understanding of their role in local economic development (Garcia & Patel, 2022).

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Conclusions

Cultural festivals significantly influence local economic development by boosting local spending, generating employment, and enhancing regional infrastructure. Empirical studies consistently demonstrate that these events create a notable increase in business revenues and job opportunities, contributing to the economic vitality of host communities. Festivals often lead to improved local infrastructure and increased tourism, which can foster long-term economic benefits if managed effectively. However, the impact of these festivals can vary widely depending on factors such as the scale of the event, local support mechanisms, and geographical context. To maximize the economic advantages, it is crucial for local governments and festival organizers to invest in targeted marketing, infrastructure improvements, and sustainable event management practices. Continued research and case studies are needed to explore the varying impacts across different types of festivals and geographical settings, ensuring that the benefits of cultural events are equitably distributed and strategically leveraged for enduring economic development.

### Recommendations

#### Theory

Develop comprehensive theoretical frameworks that incorporate not just immediate economic impacts but also long-term effects on community well-being, infrastructure, and social capital.

Theories should integrate the role of cultural festivals in fostering local identity and enhancing social cohesion, which can indirectly contribute to economic development. Encourage the use of interdisciplinary theories that bridge economic, sociological, and cultural perspectives. This holistic approach will provide a more nuanced understanding of how cultural festivals influence various aspects of local economies, offering richer insights into the dynamic interplay between culture and economic development.

### **Practice**

Local governments and festival organizers should develop targeted marketing strategies that not only attract more visitors but also extend the festival's economic benefits beyond its duration. Leveraging digital platforms and social media can enhance visibility and attract diverse audiences. Invest in improving local infrastructure, such as transportation and accommodation, to support the growing scale of cultural festivals. Enhanced infrastructure will facilitate better visitor experiences and ensure that the economic benefits of festivals are maximized. Adopt sustainable event management practices to mitigate environmental impacts and promote long-term economic benefits. This includes implementing eco-friendly practices and encouraging local businesses to adapt to increased demand generated by festivals.

### **Policy**

Develop and implement policies that provide financial and logistical support to cultural festivals. This could include grants, subsidies, or tax incentives for festivals and local businesses involved in the event. Establish public-private partnerships that involve local businesses, government agencies, and cultural organizations. These collaborations can enhance the planning and execution of festivals, ensuring that they contribute effectively to local economic development. Implement robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks to assess the long-term economic impacts of festivals. Regular evaluations can help refine strategies and policies, ensuring that cultural events are aligned with broader economic development goals.

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