

Traditional Cultural Festivals and Socio-economic Boost: Evidence from the Ankos Masquerade Festival in Ghana

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Abstract

Cultural events are largely associated with several socio-economic benefits for tourism destinations and host communities. This article explores the case of the Ankos Masquerade Festival (AMF), which takes place annually in Sekondi-Takoradi (Ghana). Although this area is known for its tourism potential, it still needs development to attract international tourism. The COVID-19 pandemic brought additional challenges as it stopped international travel and necessitated the cancellation of all types of events. In this context, the main objective of this article is to present a case study of the AMF to: (i) identify the profile of the foreign visitors/participants of the festival, their perceptions and their satisfaction level; (ii) understand the perceptions of stakeholders about the socio-economic potential of this event for the local community; and (iii) elaborate policy recommendations to inform and support the local authorities' decision-making. The AMF case study revealed new evidence about the relevance of this type of event for the development of cultural and creative tourism, for attracting international tourists, for improving the destination's image and for creating socio-economic benefits for local communities.

Keywords: Traditional festivals; cultural tourism; tourist perceptions; socio-economic impacts

Introduction

Africa is one of the continents facing more complex challenges in recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic due to its high disease burden, poor health infrastructure and poor social systems necessary for combating it (Ataguba, 2020). It is also where the most severe economic losses were experienced compared to other regions (Nyawo, 2020; Ozili, 2022; Roux, 2022). In Ghana, following the pandemic crisis, all national parks, most tourist sites and hospital industries were closed down either following government directives or through the initiatives of the facilities' managers (Soliku et al., 2021). One important festival celebration in Ghana that was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic is the Ankos Masquerade Festival (AMF), which takes place annually in Sekondi-Takoradi. It was cancelled during the pandemic years because of the imposed travel restrictions, thereby accentuating the adverse effects already being felt by the local communities.

This sudden cancellation nullified significant efforts by the Ministry of Tourism since 1992 that were being made to leverage the attraction of foreign tourists to the country. Several events took place, such as the "Pan African Historical Theatre Festival", known as "Panafest", the "Year of Return" and "Beyond the Return", focusing on attracting tourists from all over the world, especially from the Ghanaian diaspora, to experience Ghana's culture and also to promote the local tourist sites (Ghana Tourism Authority, 2019). Although it is agreed that cultural events, such as the AMF, are essential for maintaining the local cultural traditions and

preserving the local community's identity and collective memory, they can simultaneously generate negative effects (Olick, 1999; Richards & Wilson, 2004). Thus, it is fundamentally important to identify, monitor and evaluate tourism initiatives' various tangible and intangible effects and increase knowledge about them to allow local organisers to take preventive or corrective measures and build innovative solutions that improve the competitiveness of an initiative or, more broadly, the destination, making it more viable and attractive (Gato et al., 2022).

As the pandemic is fading, the community authorities are expected to bring back the festival to counter the negative impacts felt during the crisis and improve the destination's image by enhancing the touristic experience to increase Takoradi's touristic potential. Taking all these facts into consideration, the main objective of this article is to present a case study of the AMF, an important cultural event in Takoradi, to: (i) identify the profile of the foreign visitors/participants of the festival, their perceptions and their satisfaction level; (ii) understand the perceptions of stakeholders about the socio-economic potential of this event for the local community; and (iii) elaborate policy recommendations to inform and support the local authorities' decision-making. The following section presents a literature review that frames the topic discussed and analysed in this article, comprising cultural tourism, cultural events and festivals and their socio-economic impacts on the destinations. The third section presents the methodology and specific information regarding the methods used. The fourth section exhibits and discusses the results obtained. The final section concludes with recommendations for the local policymakers in Takoradi.

Literature review

Defining cultural tourism

Cultural tourism is a type of tourism activity in which visitors' primary motivation is to learn about, discover, experience and consume the tangible and intangible cultural attractions and products of a destination. The US National Endowment for the Arts defines it as “travel aimed at experiencing the arts, heritage and special character of a place” (Whyte et al., 2012: 8). Several definitions include it in a broader context of tourism and management theory (Hall & Zeppel, 1990). Cultural tourists seek authentic, meaningful experiences with the destination's culture, heritage and uniqueness (Gilmore & Pine, 2007; Jansen-Verbeke, 2009; MacCannell, 1973). This is also why the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) (2018) attributed such relevance to the community's spiritual beliefs and emotional characteristics, which include traditional beliefs, value systems, people's lifestyles, creative industries and living culture, music, literature, historical heritage and architecture.

Contemporary researchers highlighted the notion that cultural tourism is the artistic and cultural manifestation of art and drama outside their usual place of residence. This has led many destinations to pay more attention to cultural heritage, beliefs and how people live there (Richards, 2018, 2022). Using multiple definitions of “cultural tourism” is good, but each has limitations. Tourism-related definitions identify cultural tourism as a type of tourism that makes it easier to think about and discuss. However, these definitions are often generic. Motivational and experience-based definitions recognise that people have different reasons for travelling and, therefore, different experiences they want when visiting a place. These definitions pose a challenge in determining which products are fundamental. An operational definition resolves the product dilemma and points out that many cultural tourism products are places of cultural significance used by locals (Du Cros & McKercher, 2020). People visit places for different reasons, such as culture, history and tradition. Cognitive aspects drive people to cultural tourism to feel how local communities live and feel (Petkova, 2017).

Despite multiple definitions that can be used given the comprehensive nature of culture and cultural tourism, the fact is that it has existed for a long time (Zuelow, 2016). However, mass cultural tourism has been a new phase in recent decades, enabling many people to travel domestically and internationally. Cultural tourism accounts for over 39% of international travel expenditure and tourism arrivals (United Nations World Tourism Organisation [UNWTO], 2018). However, despite the widespread use of festivals to develop cultural tourism, there is an ongoing debate about the ability of festivals to attract tourists, primarily from abroad (McKercher et al., 2008). Only a minority of festival visitors are tourists (Prentice & Andersen, 2003). In some places, however, tourists can be an essential audience segment, with festivals offering visitors a window into local cultures (Richards, 2007). In summary, cultural tourism is a type of tourism that focuses on visiting different cultures. The challenge is to define it in a useful way for destination management organisations, which can use it to market the area and identify potential products. Most importantly, it can help in considering management actions that meet the needs of all stakeholders (Du Cros & McKercher, 2020).

Creative tourism as a form of cultural tourism

Cultural tourism needs to find a new way to cater to the desires of tourists seeking more meaningful and niche experiences. Creative tourism has arisen in this context at the same time as the increase in the academic debate around the creative economy (Howkins, 2001), creative cities (Landry, 2000) and creative industries (Caves, 2002), which has strongly influenced the political discourse and public policies since the beginning of the '00s. Creative tourism is an emergent and niche tourism product that focuses on experiences that are more meaningful and interactive than traditional cultural tourism, where tourists assume a more passive role as visitors. This type of tourism is growing because more and more people are looking for new ways to travel and learn new things rather than just visiting famous places (Richards & Raymond, 2000). As Duxbury and Richards (2019: 182) underline, creative tourism “is a niche tourism area that emerged both as a development of cultural tourism and in opposition to the emergence of mass cultural tourism”. Its activities commonly incorporate four dimensions: active participation, creative self-expression, learning and community engagement (Bakas et al., 2019).

There is still a lack of research that uses a holistic, integrated approach to help fill this gap. However, this is not always accurate, so new research is being done to determine the co-creation of creative experiences and the business models creative tourism entrepreneurs adopt (Duxbury & Richards, 2019). One of the biggest challenges in dealing with practice-based issues is that we do not have many examples of how to successfully do it (Bakas et al., 2019). Richards & Duxbury (2021) point out that the significant difference that separates creative tourism from cultural tourism is that in creative tourism, tourists seek to expand their knowledge of the place they are visiting and their creative skills. In many creative experiences, tourists also receive tangible end products: for instance, photos, food, crafts and clothes, among others. Creative learning and making experience can help individuals tap into and realise their latent creative abilities, thus providing a direct link between the destination’s culture and tourists and giving them something to take home as an “I-made-it-myself souvenir” (Richards & Duxbury, 2021). In this sense, creative resources are more sustainable than tangible cultural products once creative tourism uses assets that are processed in essence, emphasising the experience based upon natural and cultural resources. This, by definition, is more sustainable than traditional culture tourism based on the consumption of built environments (Prentice & Andersen, 2007; Richards & Wilson, 2006).

It is also relevant to highlight creative tourism's social and economic impacts. Wisansing and Vongvistsin (2019: 122) stress that “a Community benefitting through Creative

Tourism approach reflect a change in focus, from a macro and top-down imposition of what well-being, sustainability, and quality of life should look like for communities, to a bottom-up approach that emphasises democratic participation and empowerment in the development of locally significant understandings of the community’s own well-being and its measurement.”. They also find that creative tourism not only provides experience but builds the image of rural development through increased diversity (50% of team leaders are women); retaining the younger generation in the villages with new business opportunities; sourcing from local producers, creating backward economic linkages, and stimulating agriculture and local food production; and gastronomic trails incorporating local food foraging, cooking classes and ancillary services, reducing economic leakages.

Creative tourism outlines an experience design model based on content development, conceptualisation and enrichment. Content development encourages local communities to use artistic and storytelling skills to develop engaging and participative experiences (Richards et al., 2019). These encourage residents to think about their own culture and assets. The experience can then be enriched through the co-creation and innovation of new experiences between tourists and locals (Binkhorst & Den Dekker, 2009; Gato et al., 2022). Creative tourism can be a beneficial strategy for small places that lack the critical mass of creative producers to support significant economic activity as it is based on personal interaction, one-to-one contact between tourists and locals and experience depth (Lorentzen and van Heur, 2012; Richards, 2019).

Cultural and creative events and festivals

The organisation of cultural events denotes various social, economic and environmental benefits for tourism destinations and their host communities (Boucher et al., 2018). Tourists are interested in participating in cultural events or festivals, local celebrations, architecture, rituals and other related activities at their destinations (Christou et al., 2018; Hernández-Mogollón et al., 2018). Cultural events may include rituals, performances, ceremonials, festivals and celebrations to showcase the sociocultural habits and traditions of local communities (Oklobdžija, 2015). These kinds of events benefit not only the tourists as consumers but also the tourist destinations, as they are important ways to highlight their uniqueness and promote a positive image building (Hernández-Mogollón et al., 2018; Mtani et al., 2023). Cultural events and festivals are essential learning opportunities for visitors, helping them to develop their cultural knowledge of the place, and they are considered tourist attractions (Christou et al., 2018). The number of cultural events and festivals has increased significantly in recent years, and cultural events and festivals have become important to tourism development (Báez-Montenegro & Devesa-Fernández, 2017; Christou et al., 2018).

During cultural events, there is an increase in the capacity usage of accommodation facilities through the connection between the place where the event is taking place, and these cultural events can improve the image, planning and development of cultural tourism through the values and traditions of the community. This can increase revenues and enhance the growth of the destinations. According to O’Sullivan and Jackson (2010), local communities invest their funds in markets and promote events to provide travellers with a new and better experience. Cultural events can generate more income and benefits if executed well (Hernández-Mogollón et al., 2018). Thus, they are generally organised to create economic growth and enhance the image of tourist destinations. Cultural events can produce images related to social and cultural life at the venue (Quinn, 2005).

As Pine and Gilmore (1999) stress, creative tourism is the staging of experience central to different tourist products and destinations; as the years pass by, various authors have found

that it has been moving toward the creation process, such as through creative events (Binkhorst & Den Dekker, 2009; Campos et al., 2015; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004).

In conclusion, cultural events may consist of rituals, performances, ceremonials, festivals and celebrations to showcase the sociocultural habits and traditions of the local communities as attributed by researchers. Nevertheless, cultural events and festivals are also great learning opportunities for visitors, helping them to develop their cultural knowledge of the place and improve their psychological state. These kinds of events benefit not only the tourists, as consumers, but also the tourism destinations, as they are important ways to distinguish their uniqueness and promote a positive image building.

Methods

Objective of the study

This study focuses on the AMF, a cultural event that takes place annually in the city of Takoradi (Ghana). Similarly, to other cases, this event did not happen during the years of the COVID-19 crisis, following the contentious measures that were imposed. The 2022 edition marked the return of the festival with a high expectation of leveraging the foreign demand for the Western Region of Ghana and increasing the socio-economic benefits for the severely affected local community. In this context, a twofold case study analysis is presented based on a survey applied to the foreign tourists participating in the AMF to assess their profile, perceptions and satisfaction level, as well as a SWOT analysis built from qualitative interviews conducted with five tourism and hospitality stakeholders from Takoradi. The combination of these analyses aimed to offer a comprehensive look at the organisation of the AMF through the auscultation of both demand and supply sides and to mix quantitative (survey) and qualitative (interviews) approaches.

Quantitative approach: Tourist survey

A survey was designed to assess the demand side, particularly the foreign tourists, following Ghana's policy to increase its attraction to the country. The survey was inspired by the Cultural Tourism Survey of ATLAS (Cultural Tourism Research Programme) (Richards, 2010) and adapted for this specific context of an event. The survey comprised 34 open-ended questions divided into five sections (travel to Sekondi-Takoradi, perceptions of the AMF, expenditures, satisfaction and socio-demographics). The survey was applied to a random sample of 120 foreign tourists attending the event. All of them were gathered by inquirers inside the festival celebration. Previous editions of the event sold around 40,000 tickets. This indicates that the sample has a confidence level of 90% and a margin of error of around 7%. The data collected were analysed using SPSS IBM Statistics (v. 25).

Qualitative approach: Stakeholder interviews

A semi-structured interview guide was designed to assess the perceptions of the local stakeholders regarding the festival. It comprised 13 open questions, divided into four sections: the first part contextualised Ghana's tourism, the second one related to the perceptions of cultural tourism in Ghana and Sekondi-Takoradi, the third section related to the AMF, and the last one drew upon the future development of tourism and the event. Five interviews were conducted with local stakeholders involved in the tourism and hospitality sector and local policy actors. Specifically, the respondents comprised a local hotel manager, a local journalist, one of the AMF organisers, an AMF trombonist performer and the Effiah Kumah Chief. Interviewees were asked to give their permission for the interviews to be audio-recorded. This enabled a detailed content analysis of the qualitative data collected, which was afterwards condensed into a SWOT matrix, presented in the results section.

Results and discussion

Framing Sekondi-Takoradi City and Ankos Masquerade festival

The city of Sekondi-Takoradi is a metropolitan area located in the Western Region of Ghana. This is one of the 16 administrative regions within the country, located in the south-western area along the Atlantic Ocean. The region covers an area of 13,842 square kilometres. It has a population of approximately two million people (corresponding to 6.7% of Ghana's total population), according to the 2021 population census (Ghana Statistical Service, 2022).

Sekondi-Takoradi serves as the administrative centre for the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolitan Assembly, Ghana's third-largest metropolis after Accra and Kumasi, with 726,905 inhabitants. Sekondi-Takoradi is principally recognised for its fishing industry, which has been a long-standing tradition among the locals of this region. The city is home to the Takoradi Port, a sizable fishing harbour that serves as a spot for fishing boats to land and a market for fishmongers and traders. The port, the biggest in Ghana, handles a sizable portion of the seafood harvested from the Gulf of Guinea. It also acts as an entry and exit point for Ghana and the neighbouring landlocked nations. In addition to fishing, this city is a significant industrial and economic area, with several oil and gas businesses operating there, making it an important hub for Ghana's industry. Sekondi-Takoradi is also well known for its historical and cultural landmarks. Numerous structures from the colonial era can be found in the city, notably the Railway Museum and Sekondi-Takoradi Fort. The Western Regional Museum, which displays the history and cultural legacy of the Western Region, is also located in the city. The population of Sekondi-Takoradi is diverse, and the city has a thriving nightlife and entertainment scene with several pubs, restaurants and clubs. With good rail and road connections to other regions of Ghana, the city serves as a transportation hub for the Western Region. Due to its natural features, cultural history and historical places, Ghana's Western Region has tremendous tourism potential. However, it still needs to be developed further.

Tourism is an essential industry for Ghana's economy. In 2014, it represented 6.7% of GDP, more than 5% of all employment and 4.6% of all exports. However, the contribution of foreign spending to GDP represents only 39.9% (Deichmann & Frempong, 2016). The profile of tourists visiting the country is as follows: 64.6% are aged between 25 and 44, 50.6% are females, 48.3% are married or engaged in a consensual union, 33.3% have a basic education level and 35.1% have no education. Almost all visitors are domestic (97.1%), with 6.7% being concentrated in the Western Region (Ghana Statistical Service, 2015). The tourism industry in the Western Region has been growing steadily, with efforts by the government and private sector to promote tourism development and investment in the region. However, like many other regions globally, the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the tourism sector, and it is unclear how this affected tourism numbers in the Western Region in 2020 and beyond.

The AMF of the Takoradi people, the Kundum Festival of the Ahanta people, the Bakatue Festival of the Elmina people and the Fetu Afahye Festival of the Cape Coast people are among the numerous festivals that are held in the area throughout the year, with all of them aiming to contribute to attracting increasing numbers of foreign tourists. Every year in December, the western part of Ghana hosts the AMF, a celebration of Takoradi culture, customs and beliefs. It is a time when the community comes together to pay respect to their ancestors, ask for blessings for the future and share with outsiders their rich cultural history. The festival features a variety of performances and activities, such as traditional dances, drumming, singing, storytelling and masquerades. A durbar of chiefs and elders, where the traditional leaders and rulers of the Takoradi people congregate to offer prayers and blessings to the community, is another part of the celebration. Creating and sharing traditional foods and beverages, such as groundnut soup, palm wine and fufu, is the highlight of the event. Football

matches, volleyball battles and other classic games are examples of different sporting events. The AMF is a significant cultural occasion on the Takoradi calendar. It attracts tourists from all around Ghana and abroad who come to enjoy the vibrant and varied traditions of the Takoradi people.

Who are the foreign visitors of the AMF?

The tourist profile of the AMF visitors was determined based on a survey applied to tourists who visited and participated in the event in the 2022 edition. Table 1 summarises the profile of the sample in terms of socio-demographic characteristics.

Table 1. Profile of the sample

	N	%		N	%
Gender			Professional situation		
Male	54	53.5	Employed	59	58.4
Female	47	46.5	Self-employed	35	34.7
			Student	3	3.0
			Unemployed	2	2.0
Age			Retired	1	1.0
< 25	9	8.9	N/A	1	1.0
25-34	80	79.2			
35-44	9	8.9	Annual household gross income (€)		
45-54	2	2.0	≤ 5,000	1	1.0
N/A	1	1.0	5,001-10,000	6	5.9
			10,001-20,000	40	39.6
Educational level			20,001-30,000	33	32.7
Vocational education	44	43.6	30,001-40,000	10	9.9
Bachelor's degree	38	37.6	40,001-50,000	2	2.0
Secondary school	12	11.9	N/A	9	8.9
Master degree	3	3.0			
Doctoral degree	3	3.0	Country of residency		
N/A	1	1.0	Nigeria	12	11.9
			England	9	8.9
Professional position			Canada	8	7.9
Services and sales worker	41	40.6	Ivory Coast	8	7.9
Clients support worker	17	16.8	Kenya	8	7.9
Intellectual and scientific activities	13	12.9	France	8	7.9
Crafts and related trades workers	12	11.9	Bahamas	8	7.9
Technical and association professional	4	4.0	Brazil	8	7.9
Plants and machine operators. and assemblers	4	4.0			
Skilled agricultural. forestry and fishery workers	3	3.0	China	7	6.9
Elementary occupations	2	2.0	Denmark	7	6.9
Armed Force occupation	1	1.0	USA	6	5.9
N/A	4	4.0	Costa Rica	6	5.9
			Germany	6	5.9

Source: Own elaboration

AMF visitors are mostly males (53.5%), aged between 25 and 34 (79.2%), with the mean age being 29.09 years. With regard to educational level, most of the visitors have vocational education (43.6%), followed by a bachelor's degree (37.6%). The monthly net household income was mainly between 10,001 and 20,000 euros (39.6%) and 20,001 and 30,000 euros (32.7%). As regards the current employment situation, most of the tourists responded that they were employed (58.4%) or self-employed (34.7%), with a professional position in services or as sales workers (40.6%). Nevertheless, three other occupational groups are well represented: clients' support workers, specialists in intellectual and specific activities, and crafts and related trades workers. Most of the AMF visitors present at this event live in Nigeria (11.9%), England (8.9%), France, the Bahamas, Brazil, the Ivory Coast, Canada and Kenya (all with 7.9%).

This also underlines that fact that visitors coming from African countries are the most representative of this sample (33.7%), followed by those coming from European countries (29.7%) and those coming from North America (21.8%). South America and Asia were the least represented areas for foreign visitors. In regard to travelling preferences (Table 2), the AMF participants are mainly first-time visitors to Sekondi-Takoradi (62.4%), and the primary motivation for travelling there was to attend a cultural event (91.9%). They mostly travel with friends (43.6%) or alone (43.6%) and stay around three nights, on average, in hotel accommodation (82.2%).

Table 2. Travelling Preferences to Sekondi-Takoradi

	N	%		N	%
Motivation			Stay (Av. number of nights)	3	58
Attend a cultural event	92	91.1	Expenditures (Av.)	(€1	(%)
Visiting relative and friends	5	5.0	Travel	2,289.60	65.7
Visit culture attraction	3	3.0	Accommodation	356.49	10.4
Holiday	1	1.0	Food and drinks	293.24	8.5
First time visitor?			Shopping	279.93	8.0
Yes	63	62.4	Entertainment	258.54	7.4
No	30	29.7	Total	3,429.66	100.0
N/A	8	7.9	Pricing perception		
Travelling with...			Expensive	15	14.9
Friends	44	43.6	moderate	59	58.4
Alone	44	43.6	Normal	26	25.7
Family	13	12.9	N/A	1	1.0
Accommodation type			Willingness to pay more		
Hotel	83	82.2	Yes	6	5.9
Second Residence in Sekondi-Takoradi	2	2.0	No	92	91.1
With family and/or friends	15	14.9	N/A	3	3.0
N/A	1	1.0			

Source: Own elaboration

In terms of expenditure for the travel to Sekondi-Takoradi, on average, tourists spend €3,429,66 on their trip to Sekondi-Takoradi, and the most significant expenditure is the cost of the travel, which represents 66% of the total spending. Accommodation is the second most important cost, at 10.4%. The entertainment expenditures, in which the AMF is included, are where tourists spent less money: on average, €258,54, or 7.5% of the total budget. Most of the respondents found that the cost of this travel was moderate (58.4%) and regular (25.7%), showing simultaneously that they are not willing to pay a higher price for the next visit (91.1%). It is also noted that 14.9% of the respondents considered the total cost of this travel expensive.

When asked about their satisfaction with the visit to Sekondi-Takoradi (Table 3), the AMF participants revealed they were very satisfied (49.55%) or satisfied (49.5%). Only one respondent said he was very unsatisfied. Additionally, the tourists were asked what they considered essential to make a destination unique in terms of cultural tourism. Although the respondents considered all the answer options relevant to making a cultural tourism destination unique, the most critical factors indicated were the local people (96%), the local food (96%) and the traditional clothing (96%). The local language (87%), the cultural attractions present at the destination (79.2%), the cultural events (78.2%) and the cultural atmosphere were also noted as critical factors for the uniqueness of cultural tourism destinations.

Finally, the visitors' satisfaction with the cultural tourism experience in Sekondi-Takoradi was analysed. On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 was very bad and 10 was very good, the visitors of Sekondi-Takoradi felt that this destination provided a cultural tourism experience equivalent to 9.6 (mean). Furthermore, they thought Sekondi-Takoradi has a charming atmosphere (9.29), that there are lots of interesting things to see (9.14), that it is relaxing being there (8.85) and that the experience contributed to increasing their knowledge (8.4).

Table 3. Satisfaction with the Visit to Sekondi-Takoradi

	N	%		Average
Overall satisfaction level			Cultural tourism experience (from 1 to 10)	
Very satisfied	50	49.5	This experience has increased my knowledge	8.40
Satisfied	50	49.5	It was very relaxing being here	8.85
Unsatisfied	0	0.0	There are lots of interesting things to see	9.14
Very unsatisfied	1	1.0	I like the atmosphere of this place	9.29
			Overall	9.60
Key factors to make a cultural destination unique				
Food	97	96.0		
People	97	96.0		
Clothing	97	96.0		
Language	88	87.0		
Cultural Attractions	80	79.2		
Cultural events	79	78.2		
Cultural atmosphere	78	77.2		

Source: Own elaboration

Perceptions of tourist demand about the AMF

Several variables of the tourism demand were analysed through the survey applied to the foreign visitors/participants of the AMF. The respondents were asked if they were visiting Sekondi-Takoradi with the specific motivation of attending the AMF and if they were first-time participants in this event. Results show that for 91.4% of the respondents the AMF was the primary motivation for visiting Sekondi-Takoradi. Although this underlines the importance of this event for leveraging the tourism attraction of this specific region, it is also important to read these results with caution once the survey was applied to visitors participating in the AMF. This percentage may have decreased if the survey had been applied outside the event.

With regard to the question of whether or not the participants are first-time visitors to the event, the results show that most tourists at the AMF are first-time participants (78.2%). Nevertheless, almost 22% of the foreign tourists at the event are repeating their visit, which is a proportion that should be addressed. The most significant sources of information about this event were family and friends (56.4%) and the Internet (35.7%). Then came magazines with 7.9%, and the other answer options were not selected (travel agents, TV/news, others). The main item bought by the visitors is masquerade uniforms (62.2%), followed by masquerade photos (29.3%) and photos with a masquerade group (8.5%). Finally, the respondents were asked to rate their level of satisfaction with the AMF (on a scale of 1 to 10). The overall level of satisfaction with the experience of participating in the AMF (9.49) and the intention to return (9.38) are both high. The AMF's perceived level of authenticity was a lower-rated item, registering an average of 8.88. Despite still being a high score, the organisers should address this outcome.

Perceptions of stakeholders about the AMF

One of the aims of this study was to know stakeholders' perceptions, along with tourists' perceptions, in order to consider both the demand and supply sides. This section presents the results of the qualitative in-depth interviews with five stakeholders involved in the tourism sector in the Sekondi-Takoradi area. The information obtained was submitted to a content analysis and condensed into a SWOT matrix in Table 4. The interview analysis also demonstrated that the facilities for tourism existing at the moment are not enough in the region, and more infrastructure needs to be built to improve them. This is how to improve cultural tourism in Sekondi-Takoradi, creating jobs associated with cultural tourism and, in this sense, increasing the socio-economic benefits for the local community. Most interviewees believe that the AMF is a cultural attraction and its benefits have facilitated the development of the region and people – for instance, by improving infrastructures and providing better opportunities for the children living there. There is also peace and unity among clans, issues that have been tackled and solved because of the festival.

Table 4. SWOT Analysis of the Stakeholders' Perceptions

Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotes the image of Sekondi-Takoradi. • Increase in hotel profits during the event. • Best in Africa during this time. • Disputes are settled among the chiefs. • Visitors from all over the world visit Ghana. • Improves the cultural identity of Sekondi-Takoradi.
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expands the accommodation route. • Improvement of water supplier. • Youth empowerment benefits. • Improves cultural heritage every year. • Rising of young talents to represent in coming events. • Increasing knowledge about the AMF. • Educates future generations about the type of culture we have in the region.
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor security level during the events. • Overcrowding in most important street. • Location of the event is poorly maintained. • Inadequate training of security personnel before the event. • Insufficient capital to train and promote the masquerade dance of the event. • Inadequate investors in the region of Takoradi. • The state of the community because of poor facilities put in place reduces the attraction of the place. • The movement of tourists to another part of the region is limited because of poor road network.
Threats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not meeting accommodation needs. • Not enough promotion. • The awareness of the festival is poorly promoted, which is the scary part because we are afraid Nigeria, our neighbours, might take over with their well-known popular Ibo masquerade festival. • Most events during the period of the festival don't have enough time and resources to plan, so there is a threat of not showcasing more, and with quality, what we have. • The image of the festival has been damaged. • Our neighbours learning most of our strategies for the festival. • Decreasing the popularity of the festival.

Source: Own elaboration

The interviewees agreed that the security of the AMF has to be improved in subsequent event editions. Some also stress the need to increase the accommodation options available for tourists who will attend future editions. In terms of what local authorities should do, most stakeholders pinpoint the training of security staff who will support the police and other security personnel in charge of the festival every year. The most critical recommendation raised was that the festival should be a solution to the employment situation of the community, when the events are properly managed, as this will engage young people in work, thereby reducing unemployment in the region. Additionally, the AMF needs to be better promoted to attract more international tourists and gain popularity among the segments of cultural events. In order to make all the improvements pointed out above, it is essential to increase the government's involvement in the festival. According to the interviewees, there is a critical need for more investment to solve the weaknesses underlined and increase the quality of the AMF.

Conclusion and implications

Most countries with popular tourist attractions are working incredibly hard to recover from the shock of the pandemic crisis. They are also looking for ways to increase the number of visitors, particularly international tourists. Thus, comprehending and emphasising how traditional cultural festivals may attract people to a particular place is crucial. The fundamental objective of the present research is to provide new evidence about the relevance of this type of event, through the case study of the AMF, for the development of cultural and creative tourism, for attracting international tourists, for improving the destination's image and for creating socio-economic benefits for local communities.

The literature review highlighted the connection between creativity and cultural tourism and the benefits of the two for the host communities. It also emphasised how vital tourist visits are to cultural and creative tourism. Most tourist destinations are working hard to recover from

the pandemic crisis shock and finding ways to increase the number of visitors in their country again. As a result, there is a need to understand how festivals can achieve solutions to attract tourists to a particular destination. The research carried out indicates that cultural tourism is a type of tourism that is focused on visiting different cultures. Cultural tourism refers to the cultural history of a place, including all the tangible and intangible aspects that can be traced. Cultural events, such as the AMF, are important for maintaining the local cultural traditions and for preserving the local community identity, as they act as temporary accentuators of the cultural trademarks of a place. However, they also strongly impact the perceived image of the destination, the tourism experience and the participants' engagement, as well as having the capacity to provide socio-economic development for the area. Cultural tourism is also crucial for conserving cultural and historical assets, as it creates revenues that can be targeted for that goal. Thus, the more tourists are interested in cultural heritage and events, the more funding they attract.

The emergence of “creative tourism” brought new potential to alter current tourism models and aid in developing novel experiences. This kind of tourism involves not just outbound travellers experiencing a nation's culture but also the society that develops and upholds the nation's traditions and core values. The existence of the consumerist culture significantly impacted these elements that contributed to the growth of creative tourism. People were compelled to consider what existed then and the need to maintain it. The emergence of creative tourism was primarily impacted by changing thinking patterns and having more leisure time, which increased people's desire to learn more than what mass visitors had already learned. Thus, this study can aid in illuminating the channels by which cultural tourism might be shared within the community.

However, it has been crucial that the evolution of cultural tourism and the creative tourism form has been one of the branches of cultural tourism's recent development. This has made so many destinations very interesting, enhancing the cultural heritages and beliefs and how people live there (Richards, 2018). In other words, it has also increased the socio-economic importance of these places because tourists and nationals purchase products such as food, clothes, artefacts, souvenirs, transport and accommodation, among other things. The UNWTO (2018) stresses that cultural tourism accounts for over 39% of international travel expenditure among tourists, demonstrating the importance of this segment in the tourism industry today. By highlighting aspects of the tourist profile, such as income, age, spending and countries of origin, the study has established the relationship between creativity and cultural tourism and the advantages of the two for the particular case of the AMF.

In the case of the AMF, people spent more, promoting the economic situation of the people living there, for example on hotel bookings, purchasing souvenirs, food and traditional clothing, among other things. The main findings from the research also underline the socio-economic importance of the AMF and the impact tourists have on the destination, as emphasised by local stakeholders. The level of satisfaction with visiting Sekondi-Takoradi, and with the AMF in particular, is high. However, many future improvements need to be made to warranty basic aspects like security, infrastructure maintenance, accessibility, investment and promotion, which are yet to be achieved in an adequate stage for the festival to gain dimension and expression in its segment, as also noted by Diminyi et al. (2022). This is the only way to make it possible to attract more international tourists and increase the socio-economic benefits resulting from it for the local community.

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