

Impact study confirms NAF's economic contribution

The National Arts Festival (NAF) is a significant driver of the economy of the City of Grahamstown and the Eastern Cape Province, contributing an estimated R349.9m to its economy, and residents are adamant that the event is part of what makes their City special.

These are among the conclusions of a major socio-economic study conducted in 2013, the results were recently released. The study was undertaken by a team from the Rhodes University Economics Department, led by Professor Geoff Antrobus and Jen Snowball.

The study also found that visitors from outside the province spend an additional R27.3m in the province before and after they attend the event, and the Festival contributes an estimated R90m to the GDP of the City of Grahamstown through direct and indirect spend, job creation and tourism activity.

"In a relatively poor province, like the Eastern Cape, this represents a considerable inflow of funds which would otherwise not have been attracted to the region," the study concluded.

The study also painted a picture of who was attending the Festival, and what their feelings toward the event are.

"We are seeing extremely high levels of loyalty from Festinos, with many returning year after year," Festival CEO Tony Lankester said. "On average respondents were attending their fifth or sixth Festival. What is also interesting is how the audience is shifting in terms of demographics - in 2006 the second most frequently spoken home language, after English, was Afrikaans. In 2013 it is one of the African Languages, as reported by nearly one in five Festivalgoers. 40% of the Festival audience is not white, another significant shift showing that the business' strategy of broadening its appeal is working."

Other finding

Other figures from the study show:

- 81% of visitors to the Festival rated shows on the Main programme either 4 or 5 out of 5 in terms of quality.
- When asked to rate the likelihood that they would come back to the Festival, respondents gave an average score of 4.2 out of 5

The study was consistent with similar pieces of research conducted elsewhere in the world in demonstrating that the major beneficiaries of Festivals are the tourism and hospitality industries. "In Grahamstown one can conclude that there is

additional benefit to the education industry - the private schools and Rhodes University - who benefit from positive perceptions of the City and its uniqueness perpetuated by the Festival," Lankester said.

"For us these figures illustrate the extent to which the Festival has become a vital part of the local economy," Lankester continued. "But it is more than that. Apart from the economic value, the study shows how the Festival helps shift and shape the socio-cultural landscape on a national level."

Social impact

For the first time in a South African study of the Festival, questions relating to the social impact of the event were asked. "We wanted to see how the Festival affects how people interact with each other, how it affects the way they perceive their city and whether or not they view it as an enhancement to their lives," Snowball said.

The response was positive: Nearly 80% of respondents believe that the Festival plays an important role in creating the identity of Grahamstown, saying that it is an important part of what makes the City a "special place".

The role that the Festival plays in building social cohesion was also emphasized by the study. Nearly 70% of respondents agreed with the statement "The Festival is an event where people from different cultures and backgrounds can meet and talk together"

"This is an encouraging indication that the Festival offers important opportunities for interaction and conversation across race, class and cultural backgrounds," Snowball said.

Lankester agreed, adding that the Festival "has always advocated the arts as a basis for dialogue and for people to meet each other. Our artists are deeply sensitive to the need for this interaction in South Africa," he said, "Events such as the Festival can give life to that and can make those necessary conversations happen."

The study also paints a picture of what two key stakeholder groups - artists and the media - have of the Festival, resulting in what organisers say is a "rich tapestry of perceptions, both positive and negative, that we can use as we think about what we do, how we do it, and why we do it".

"Artists have indicated that they want to see more collaboration happen at the Festival, they want more opportunity to expand their networks. Media, on the other hand, are concerned with the income disparities in the City and asked questions about how the Festival can begin to address those," Lankester said. "These are useful snapshots of opinion for us that we can use as we develop our strategy and planning for the years ahead."

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