



Strategic Management of Locally-Driven Tourism Events for Destination Sustainability

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ABSTRACT: This paper explores how small-scale event organisers manage their initiatives to contribute to sustainable destination development. Based on qualitative interviews with organisers of local cultural and sports events held in Greece, our findings highlight strategies for marketing positioning, resource mobilisation, stakeholder collaboration, and legacy building. Despite constraints and challenges, organisers appear to act as destination managers in practice, balancing tourism impacts with community goals.

KEYWORDS: small-scale events, regional development, stakeholder collaboration, place-making, tourism, cultural festivals, sport tourism.

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Introduction

Large-scale events have been widely discussed both by researchers and media mainly due to their substantial economic impact, but small-scale events, such as local cultural or sports ones, are also capable of delivering significant benefits to local businesses and communities (Daniels et al., 2003; Gibson et al., 2012; Gkarane et al., 2024). These locally organized events are typically managed informally and with limited funding, producing less revenue than significant events (Gibson et al., 2012). Despite this, the importance of small events for local development should not be underestimated (Gkarane et al., 2025; Gursoy et al., 2004). Lesser-known destinations have

experienced increased tourism activity due to local cultural and sports events, fostering sustainable growth (Goulas, 2025; Melo et al., 2021). Their potential lies in two main areas: they can attract tourists throughout the year, and they can also contribute to the social and cultural life of a destination, leading to valuable intangible benefits (Gibson et al., 2012; Gkarane and Vassiliadis, 2024; Gkarane et al., 2025). Indeed, locally driven events have grown significantly and become popular; yet, there has been a lack of research evaluating their social, environmental, and cultural consequences on the destination, primarily through the lens of their organizers (Gkarane, 2024; Gursoy et al., 2004). When organized regularly, these events can significantly support local sustainable development by utilizing existing resources effectively, encouraging community participation, and ensuring a continuous flow of visitors (Melo et al., 2021). Besides, these initiatives can often employ innovative business strategies that benefit both the economy and the local community (Goulas et al., 2025; Papanikolaou et al., 2025; Tsotsas et al., 2025).

Despite the acknowledged value of these events, academics have mainly neglected the strategic managerial approaches adopted by their organizers. Current research primarily investigates the experiences of participants, spectators, and host communities (Bazzanella et al., 2023). However, it is also essential to obtain the perspectives of core stakeholders, namely organizers and investors, to define the long-term legacy of event tourism (Ruhanen, 2009). This paper aims to fill this gap by examining how small-scale, specialized Greek events affect local tourism growth and destination sustainability. It gathers in-depth insights directly from event organizers regarding their strategic goals, partnerships, obstacles and results, focusing particularly on the strategic contribution of the events to destination sustainability.

Research Aim and Research Questions

This study uses a qualitative methodology (specifically semi-structured interviews) to explore the role of twelve diverse locally-driven small-scale events in Greek tourism development and sustainability. The events were purposively selected to represent a wide variety of contexts (different types and locations) to ensure broad applicability (Table 1). The research focused on interviewing the organisers of these events to gather in-depth data. Their selection was based on their central role and expertise in planning and implementing initiatives that contribute to local tourism growth.

Table 1

Summary of examined event cases

Epirus - Acheron Fest	Cultural Event for Local Heritage and Environment
Filippiada - Dino Day	Dinosaur-Themed Educational and Interactive Event for Kids and Families
Ioannina - Filyra Traditional Music Festival	Off-Season Athletic Event to Increase Local Tourism
Kalampaka - Climbing Festival	Adventure Sports Tourism Event in Meteora
Kavala - Cosmopolis Festival	Cultural Festival with music, dance, gastronomy and exhibitions
Kilkis - Night Half Marathon	Off-Season Athletic Event
Kilkis - Piroshki Competition	Pontic Community Cultural-Gastronomic Event
Serres - Horseback Riding Gathering	Amateur Riding Competition

Serres – Lake Kerkini Activities	Nature and Outdoor Event Series
Serres – Music and Art festival	Modern Youth Culture Through Music and Visual Arts
Serres – Serexpo	Local Products, Cuisine and Entrepreneurship with a Tourism Dimension
Voio - Fiesta	Youth Cultural Festival

Source: authors' own development

The following research questions guided the study:

- What managerial approaches do organisers employ to ensure the sustainability of their locally-driven events?
- How do event organisers develop partnerships and collaborations with local businesses?
- What kind of challenges do they face during the planning and execution stages of these events from a managerial perspective?

The thematic analysis that followed revealed key patterns related to the management strategies employed by organisers, the economic mechanisms activated through their events and the nature of their collaborations with local stakeholders.

Research Results

The findings emphasised the managerial role of event organisers in achieving sustainable tourism outcomes at the local level. The following five domains emerged from the thematic analysis:

Strategic Positioning: Events are intentionally framed as platforms for promoting local identity and showcasing destination assets, while also reinforcing both cultural heritage and tourism appeal. Organisers leverage storytelling and culture to position their events as authentic tourism experiences, apart from just entertainment. For example, local events like Cosmopolis and Acheron Fest incorporate local narratives and natural heritage to enhance the destination's tourism image.

Resource Mobilisation: Financial scarcity is a consistent issue; however, organisers often rely on volunteerism, in-kind contributions and creative partnerships. These approaches are essential not only for sustaining the event operations but mainly for ensuring continuity.

Stakeholder Collaboration: Municipalities, chambers of commerce, cultural associations, and local producers are key allies for locally driven event organisers. Collaborative marketing actions, such as joint promotional campaigns, enhance both the event's appeal and regional tourism goals. Events like the SEREXPO illustrate how these kinds of partnerships have their own economic and tourism footprint on the destination.

Continuity and Legacy: Events embedded in annual cultural calendars or connected to broader narratives (e.g., gastronomy, heritage, nature) generate long-term tourism benefits. Thus, they become destination assets, not just isolated or one-off occurrences.

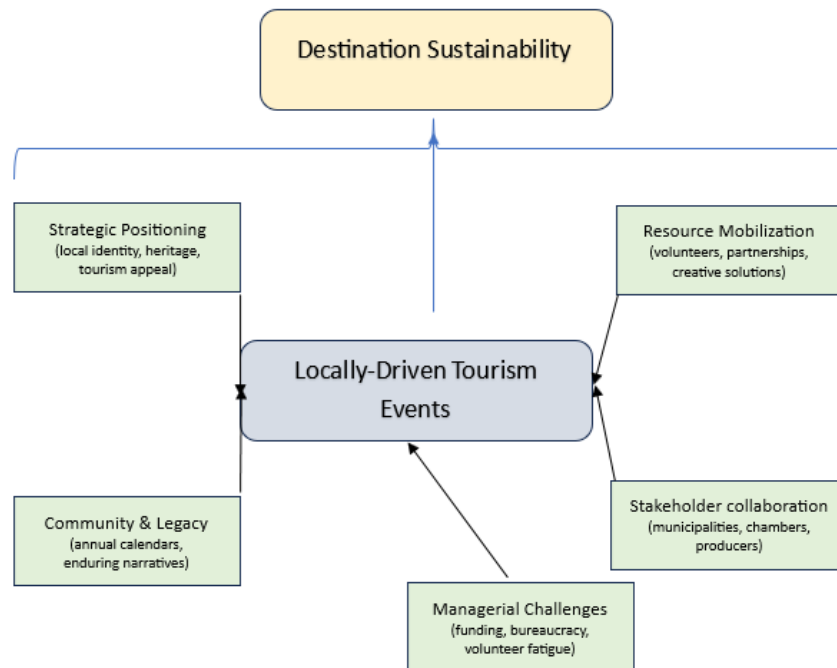
Managerial Challenges: Despite the events' strategic importance, organisers face persistent barriers. These may include limited funding, bureaucratic procedures, and volunteer fatigue, all of which can even constrain long-term strategic planning. Yet, their adaptive management responses demonstrate resilience and commitment to sustainability.

The empirical findings were synthesised into a conceptual framework (Framework 1) that illustrates how locally driven events act as vehicles for destination sustainability, based on organisers'

viewpoints. Each dimension highlights not only *what* organisers accomplish (e.g., positioning the destination and creating a legacy) but also *how* these practices balance community goals with sustainable tourism impacts despite persistent managerial challenges.

Figure 1

Managerial and Marketing Pathways to Destination Sustainability through Local Tourism Events



Source: author(s) own development

Conclusions

In conclusion, this study confirms that locally-driven events are vital instruments for sustainable tourism development in Greece. Our findings suggest that these initiatives are not just local gatherings, but they can also become strategic agents of the destinations when appropriately managed. Organisers' ability to reposition the destination constantly demonstrates that strategic management practices developed locally can lead to long-term value of event tourism. Future research could expand on these findings by testing the conceptual framework quantitatively to validate the relationships between strategic management practices and sustainable outcomes across a larger sample of events and organisers.

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