

A ‘Rite of Passage’ Youth Festival in South Africa: The Origins, Attendees and Organization of Matric Vac

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ABSTRACT

Festival tourism studies are dominated by works relating to North America, Europe and Australia. This paper examines an aspect of festival tourism in the setting of the global South. One rising destination for hosting an array of cultural and other festivals linked to local economic and community development is South Africa. The specific objectives of this article are to provide an exploratory analysis of the origins, organization and attendees of one particular South African rite of passage youth festival, namely the matriculation vacation or ‘matric vac’. This annual post-school rite of passage festival parallels other youth tourism festivals occurring in USA and Australia. It is shown this festival is a post-school rite of passage for mainly affluent, white youth in South Africa and focused geographically at a small number of coastal destinations where common themes are the provision of beach entertainment, organized parties, night clubbing and live music acts. Of significance are seemingly important differences between the organizational dynamics of this South African youth festival as compared to Schoolies Week in Australia or Spring Break in USA. The local South African festival organizers have introduced several mitigation or containment strategies in order to ensure maximum safety and security of attendees as well as to counter any potential resident resistance towards the hosting of such local events.

Keywords: *Festival tourism, youth tourism, rite of passage festival, South Africa.*

1. INTRODUCTION, AIMS AND STRUCTURE

Festivals are a significant research topic for tourism scholars (Getz, 2008, 2010; Getz and Page, 2016). Bruwer (2015: 434) defines festivals as “events generally short in duration with a specific theme”. O’Sullivan and Jackson (2002: 325) describe festival tourism as “a phenomenon in which people from outside a festival locale visit during the festival period”. According to Ma and Lew (2012) festivals have emerged as a significant tool both for energising economic development in tourism as well as re-imaging and re-branding urban centres and regions as cultural centres. Over 25 years ago Getz and Frisby (1988: 22) isolated festival tourism as “an emerging giant” with a dramatic increase observed in the numbers of festivals.

A useful conceptual framework for studying festival tourism is proposed by Ma and Lew (2012) who identify four types of festival events, namely local heritage festivals, local contemporary festivals, national heritage festivals and global contemporary festivals each of which faces an array of different issues in respect of local identity, liminality, uniqueness, and authenticity. From a tourism perspective festivals create ‘products’, enliven a destination, and promise a glimpse into the authentic culture of a place (Quinn 2006: 301). The importance of festival tourism has arisen not only because of the obvious benefits to individuals and organisations for income generation but increasingly for its potential for promotion of local economic growth, community development and urban regeneration. Saayman and Saayman (2006) point out that whilst cultural events primarily are hosted to enhance, expand or celebrate a particular culture, their economic significance cannot be gainsaid. The presence of a festival generates a type of ‘place distinctiveness’ creating appeal and interest towards the event whilst often generating a ‘brand identity’ through association with the destination (Fredline and Faulkner 2000). This in turn has the potential to attract visitors, investors and sponsors along with their income-generating benefits to a locality (Quinn 2006; Monterrubio and Andriotis 2014). Festival tourism is noted to generate large amounts of income for the areas in which they occur whilst allowing host communities to share their culture, environment and most notably ‘spending opportunities’ with visitors (O’Sullivan and Jackson 2002).

As demonstrated by the works of Getz (2010) and Getz and Page (2016) a diverse international scholarship has emerged around different aspects of festival tourism particularly over the past decade. Among key themes are research on encounters between residents and tourists (Giovanardi et al. 2014), support for cultural identities (Nurse 2002), local economic impacts and the role of entrepreneurs (O’Sullivan and Jackson 2002; Wilson et al. 2014), residents and visitor perceptions (Anwar and Sohail 2004; Ballantyne et al. 2014, Maneenetr and Tran 2014; Shen 2014), social significance (Quinn 2006; Chang et al. 2014), motivations for attending festivals (Mohammad 2014), place marketing (Prentice and Anderson 2003), and consuming expressions of culture (Robinson et al. 2004). In terms of scholarship the largest body of writings concerns festival tourism in the global North. This said, festival tourism is a phenomenon of rising significance for tourism scholars of the global South (Visser 2005).

Against this backdrop, in the setting of the global South the objective in this paper is to analyse a special form of what Getz (2010: 2) would recognise as “themed public celebrations” and what Ma and Lew (2012) would characterise as a local contemporary festival. The specific aims in this paper are to provide an exploratory analysis of the origins, attendees and organization of one particular festival occurring in South Africa, namely the matric vac festival, which is an annual post-school rite of passage festival, held in November and December. This festival has parallels with similar rite of passage youth tourism festivals occurring in the USA and Australia. A major knowledge gap exists with respect to understanding of youth festivals in the global South as a whole and sub-Saharan

Africa more specifically. In addressing this investigatory void the discussion unfolds through three uneven sections of material. These will chart first, festival tourism in South Africa, second, international rite of passage youth tourism festivals in the USA and Australia, and third the South African matric vac festival with a particular focus on its origins, participants and organisation.

2. FESTIVAL TOURISM IN SOUTH AFRICA

Despite an upsurge of tourism scholarship over the two decades in South Africa and sub-Saharan Africa more generally (Rogerson and Rogerson 2011; Rogerson 2012; Rogerson and Visser 2014) research on festival tourism was relatively sparse until recently. The neglect of festival tourism is surprising in view of both the growth in the numbers and the range of festivals and in particular their expanded importance for local tourism promotion and urban economic development. In terms of themes of festivals in South Africa Visser (2005, 2007) documents the proliferation of arts and music (jazz) festivals, drama festivals, and of cultural festivals (particularly celebrating Afrikaans language and culture). In addition, there is growing popularity of food (cheese, cherries, oysters and crayfish) and drink festivals (mainly wine but beer is growing in popularity), film festivals, as well as a category of identity-based festivals which would include those dealing with for example ethnic Zulu history or festivals celebrating gay identities. Further, there is a category of sports festivals many of which relates to cycling or athletics marathons. Among the most well-known and largest individual festivals are the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown, Aardklop, Mother City Queer Project, Argus Cycle Event, and Minstrels Festival (formerly Coon Carnival) in Cape Town. Festival tourism is overwhelmingly an element of domestic tourism flows in South Africa (Rogerson 2015). Geographically festivals are distributed unevenly across South Africa with the largest share taking place in the country's major urban tourism destinations (Rogerson and Visser 2007; Rogerson and Rogerson 2014). Cape Town and the Western Cape province are the leading foci of festivals. Next in significance for the hosting of festivals are Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal, the country's two most populated provinces (Visser 2007). Nevertheless, the role of festivals for tourism development is seen as significant outside the country's large cities. Indeed, especially in small towns festivals can represent important levers for contributing to place-based local economic development (Rogerson 2014).

In terms of the upturn in recent work on festival tourism in South Africa a number of key themes dominate local research. Several investigations have explored issues of the nature of visitor or 'festino' (festival goers) spending patterns and reasons for attendance at various festivals (Van Zyl and Botha 2004; Kruger and Saayman 2009; Kruger et al. 2009; Saayman and Krugell 2009; Kruger and Ellis 2010; Saayman 2011; Saayman et al. 2012; Labuschagne and Saayman 2014; Saayman and Saayman 2014). Other prominent themes that have

come under scrutiny include the social dynamics of festivals (van der Vyver and du Plooy-Cilliers 2006), local economic impacts (Saayman and Saayman 2006; Saayman and Rossouw 2010, 2011), attendee satisfaction at festivals (Welthagen 2015), managing visitors' experiences (Marais and Saayman 2011; Williams and Saayman 2011) and cultural aspects of festival entrepreneurship (Engelbrecht et al. 2011). Visser (2007) points to the dominance of festival tourism research in South Africa on arts and cultural festivals; in addition, wine festivals have gained a prominent recent role. Despite the emergence of research around youth tourism in South Africa (eg Rogerson 2011; Rogerson and Slater 2014), the issue of the youth festivals has not received attention.

3. INTERNATIONAL YOUTH FESTIVALS

The international context of youth rite of passage festivals can be illustrated by two notable examples, namely, the Spring Break phenomenon of college students in USA and Schoolies Week in Australia. In the USA college students embark upon a week-long event in which they congregate at various resort destinations during their spring holidays. This event is known as 'Spring Break' (Monterrubio and Andriotis 2014). Hobson and Josiam (1993, 1996) consider Spring Break travel to be a uniquely North American youth tourism phenomenon which represents a "multibillion dollar consumption phenomenon" (Babin and Kim 2001: 94). Taking part in Spring Break is not common among all demographic strata, however, but has become an important rite of passage for American college students.

The roots of Spring Break are linked to Fort Lauderdale in Florida which, beginning from small crowds of college students coming to the city in the 1940s and 1950s, reached a point that Schiltz (2013: 6) describes as an "annual invasion of hundreds of thousands of collegians for Spring Break". It is argued that the 1960s Spring Break film *Where The Boys Are* fundamentally transformed the tradition and institutionalized Spring Break in Fort Lauderdale as a rite of passage among American youth (Schiltz 2013). The city of Fort Lauderdale became the unquestioned Spring Break capital of the USA and in 1985 reached unprecedented heights with 350 000 collegians travelling to the city generating an estimated spending of \$120 million. Of significance, however, is the demise of Fort Lauderdale as Spring Break Mecca as college students' drunkenness and debauchery triggered protests amongst residents that lead ultimately to the downturn of the tradition of Spring Break in the city. With the abdication of Fort Lauderdale from "its Spring Break throne" (Schiltz 2013: 97) the geography of the Spring Break phenomenon broadened to include other destinations such as Daytona Beach in Florida and farther afield to the destinations of Cancun and Acapulco in Mexico.

In Australia 'Schoolies' is a period of celebration which is undertaken by the country's school students (leavers) after completion of their final exams.

Pettigrew et al. (2015) point out it is acknowledged as a rite of passage that typically involves leavers journeying to holiday destinations where they congregate in large numbers to mark the end of their secondary schooling and beginning of a more independent stage of their lives. Temporally the celebrations can extend from a few days to a few weeks (Pettigrew et al. 2015). The most well-established destination for Schoolies is the Gold Coast of Queensland, where 'Schoolies Week' is an annual event that informally emerged in the 1970s and was formalized in the 1990s and 2000s with the growth of organized tours, packages and sponsorships. Today this seven day event attracts up to 30 000 leavers who celebrate their recent completion of high school with numerous parties and events (Weaver and Lawton 2013). Pettigrew et al. (2015) point out that Schoolies has also become common in Western Australia with favoured destinations including the holiday island of Rottnest and some of the larger towns of the South West such as Dunsborough, Busselton and Margaret River. Gold Coast Schoolies Week with its associations of extensive partying and drinking has become a contentious or controversial tourism event (Weaver and Lawton 2013; Lawton and Weaver 2015).

Overall, the existing body of research on these two rite of passage youth festivals in Australia and the United States is dominated by works which examine health risk behaviours synonymous with binge drinking and the risk-taking activities of college students or school leavers (see Smith and Rosenthal 1997; Josiam et al. 1998; Sönmez et al. 2006; Lubman et al. 2014; Pettigrew et al. 2015). Excessive consumption of alcohol is associated with drug abuse, placing attendees at a high risk for contracting sexually transmitted diseases because of high recorded levels of casual sex (Smith and Rosenthal 1997; Zinkiewicz et al. 1999; Maticka-Tyndale et al. 2003; Pettigrew et al. 2015). Questions around resident perceptions of rowdyism, drunkenness and students' misbehaviour have been explored especially in Australia (Weaver and Lawton 2013; Lawton and Weaver 2015). Although aspects of "deviant over-indulgence and high-risk behaviour" are omnipresent within most contentious events it is noted local authorities and organisations "expect Schoolies to behave like responsible adults during a rite of passage" where these potential negative influences are present (Weaver and Lawton 2013: 167).

Several studies point to the need for 'harm minimization interventions' or 'containment strategies' targeted at the participants in these youth festivals and not least for reasons of addressing residents' concerns about anti-social and high risk behaviour (Zinkiewicz et al. 1999; Weaver and Lawton. 2013; Lawton and Weaver 2015). Local residents are impacted in a variety of ways and it is noted that "complex resident attitudes might be expected" (Weaver and Lawton 2013: 167). Nevertheless, whilst events such as Spring Break and Schoolies week are associated with numerous negative impacts often they are still favoured events by destinations due to the festival goers' utilization of local amenities which can generate additional income for local businesses and "substantial direct and indirect economic benefits" for the area (Weaver and Lawton 2013: 167). It is

against the background of these controversies about the local impacts of these rite of passage youth tourism festivals in the USA and Australia that our attention moves now to South Africa.

4. MATRIC VAC

The ‘matric vac’ is a post school vacation which is undertaken by a growing number of South African school leavers each year. In a parallel with Schoolies in Australia, after completing final examinations thousands of South African school leavers travel to a number of coastal centres in order to take part in a week to ten day celebration of the end of school and the beginning of the journey to adulthood and independence. It will be argued that over recent decades this South African rite of passage experience has become not only more popular and geographically diversified but also more organized and commercialized. The analysis of matric vac focuses here on three issues, namely its origins, a portrayal of the attendees, and importantly of the organization of this youth festival. Different research methods were utilized in this study. These include interviews undertaken with the major enterprises involved in managing and organizing the event, a survey of school leavers and of First year university students who had attended the matric vac, and a range of documentary sources. The discussion also draws upon participant observation from the attendance by one of the authors of matric vac celebrations which was held at the end of 2014 at two different beach locations.

4.1 THE ORIGIN AND INSTITUTIONALISATION OF ‘MATRIC VAC’

The tradition of matric vac is of South African school-leavers travelling to various coastal regions for a holiday to celebrate their new found adulthood. The terminology of ‘matric vac’ refers to the generic phenomenon in South Africa of this rite of passage youth festival. In the coastal destinations of South Africa where this phenomenon occurs, a shift occurs to describe the events as ‘Rage’. At the two leading destinations the matric vac festivals therefore are described commonly as ‘Plett Rage’ and ‘Matric Rage’.

The matric vac festivals are a phenomenon with its origins during the 1980s. The tradition of matric vac began with school-leavers mainly drawn from the country’s largest cities that had just finished their final matriculation exams looking for a way to celebrate the end of their high school career. Accordingly, groups of friends would spontaneously set off on a summer vacation to the closest coastal town to enjoy a holiday. This unorganised informal travel would include small house parties and attendance at local clubs. It has been recorded: “Plett Rage unofficially started off as a few hundred students migrating to Plett for a few days

in the early 80's for good times and to celebrate the summer" (Plettrage 2014). This movement gradually became a widely adopted practice as school-leavers from around South Africa began to undertake their own matric vacations.

For a number of years the matric vac was simply a time when school leavers from the country's major cities would frequent local coastal towns. It became seen as the "thing to do" for those who had just finished school. A road trip was planned and school-leavers would drive to the nearest coastal town for the purpose of a holiday. Initially, there was no specific coastal 'hotspot' or destination that school-leavers favoured as attendees would generally determine their destination according to geographic proximity. Accordingly, throughout the 1980s and 1990s South Africa's matric vac was characterised by informal groupings of friends going on holiday to convenient and affordable seaside destinations. For many attendees this marked the point at which they had begun to take their initial proverbial steps to adulthood by embarking on their first unsupervised holiday.

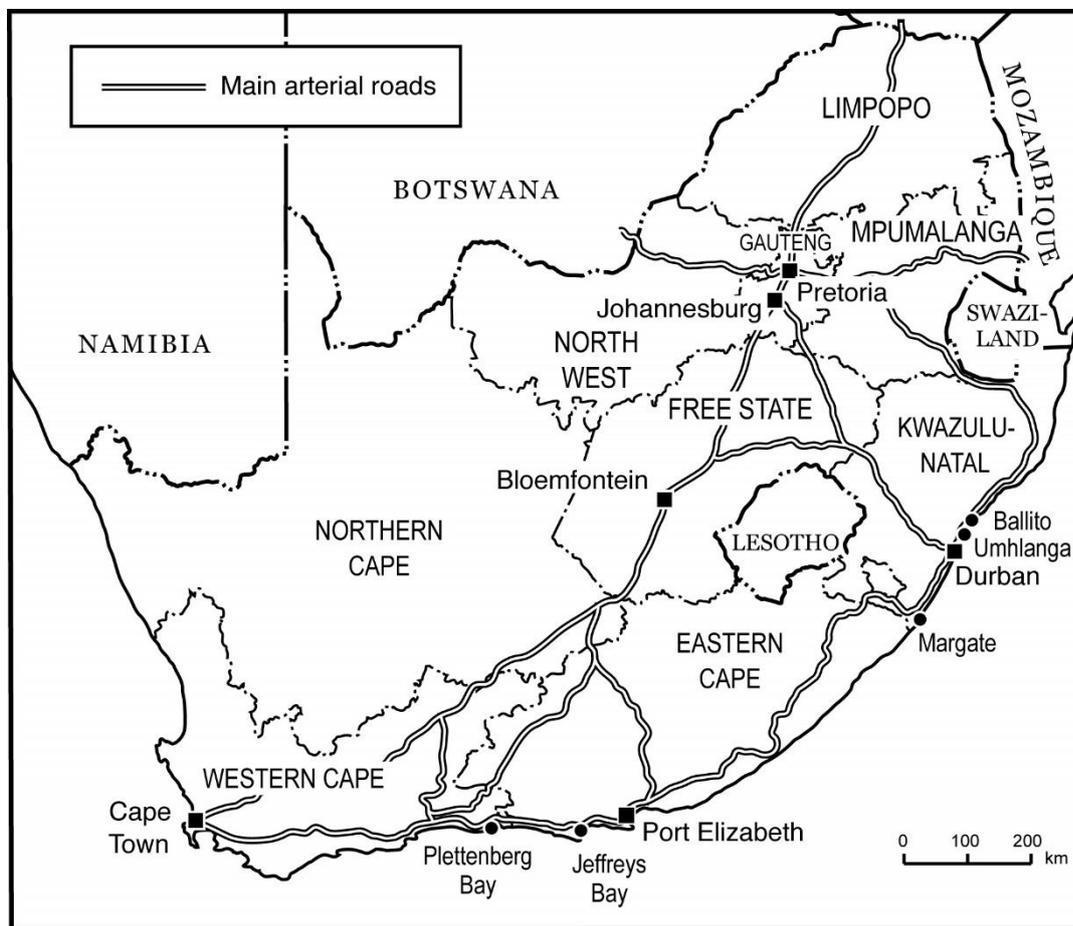


Figure 1. *The location of matric vac festivals (Source: Authors).*

The institutionalisation of matric vac commenced in 2001 when a business opportunity was realized by local entrepreneurs around the product of youth festivals in South Africa. During 2001 there occurred the first year of small-scale commercially organized post-school celebrations. These were focussed at the beach destinations of Plettenberg Bay in the Western Cape and at Umhlanga

Rocks and Ballito in KwaZulu Natal (Figure 1). All three of these locations were established popular domestic tourism destinations particularly for white South Africans (Rogerson and Lisa 2005). In addition, these destinations were some of the country's most important venues for time-share resort developments in South Africa (Pandy and Rogerson 2013a, 2013b).

At Plettenberg Bay the institutionalisation of the matric vac was led by an events company which hosted parties for school leavers at various local night clubs during this period. These parties were hosted specially for attendees and subsequently titled 'Plett Rage' (Plett Rage 2011). Likewise, similar trajectories of institutionalisation began to occur by 2004 at the two coastal destinations in KwaZulu-Natal, namely at Umhlanga Rocks and Ballito where a number of local bars and nightclubs began hosting dedicated events for school-leavers. The post-school festivals held at Umhlanga Rocks and Ballito, namely Matric Rage, have experienced a turbulent and competitive developmental history with a churning and turnover in different organisations engaged in promoting celebrations for school leavers. By contrast, at Plettenberg Bay in the Western Cape school-leaving events have been managed and organized by the same events company since inception in 2001. This has ensured continuity and a steady evolution of the festival over the years. By 2010 the marketing slogan was 'Destination Freedom' drawing upon the narrative that young adults are out of school and have the freedom now to enjoy an unsupervised holiday.

Both Plett Rage and the Matric Rage Festival started as week-long events characterised by hosting parties. Between 2004 and 2010 the events rapidly gained popularity and marketed as a two and a half week-long festival. During these two weeks it generally occurred that those who attended government schools would support the first week of Matric Rage and those from private schools would attend the second week conditional upon when schools finished final examinations. Not many attendees would attend the full two and a half weeks. This split of attendees between private and government school leavers ultimately fell away such that by 2012 Matric Rage had become a 10 day festival hosted for all school-leavers to attend together. The shortening of the length of these youth festivals allowed the event organisers to provide a 'bigger and better' experience for attendees in terms of entertainment and event consistency.

As these youth festivals have become progressively institutionalised the organisers of both Plett Rage and the Matric Rage Festivals concentrated their attention upon highlighting entertainment and event safety as the key attractions for prospective attendees. From small beginnings in 2001 matric vac in both regions developed from hosting a few parties to having a party each night by 2007 and multiple events each evening by 2009. Since 2010, however, both Plett Rage and the Matric Rage Festivals have begun to place greater focus on daytime activities as well as the availability of 24 hour entertainment for the Matric Rage attendees. Indeed, in an interview with one of the key event organisers, it was disclosed "There is more to Rage than just having a party at night and alcohol" (Jacobs 2014).

4.2 ATTENDEES

Since its institutionalisation in the early 2000s the number of attendees at the matric vac festival destinations has surged. Precise numbers are unavailable with the best estimates those which are provided by event organisers. The consensus is that an event that originated through sporadic holidays and parties for only a few hundred attendees in the 1980s and 1990s had grown and expanded into a phenomenon that by 2014 was attracting approximately 40 000 attendees at the national level. The largest concentrations of matric vac attendees are estimated at the KwaZulu-Natal destinations of Umhlanga Rocks and Ballito Bay with 25 000 school leavers followed by Plettenberg Bay between 10–15 000 attendees. Smaller numbers of school leavers are attracted also to the newer matric vac festivals which have spread to include Margate on the South Coast of KwaZulu-Natal and Jeffrey's Bay, a surfing hotspot in Eastern Cape (see Figure 1).

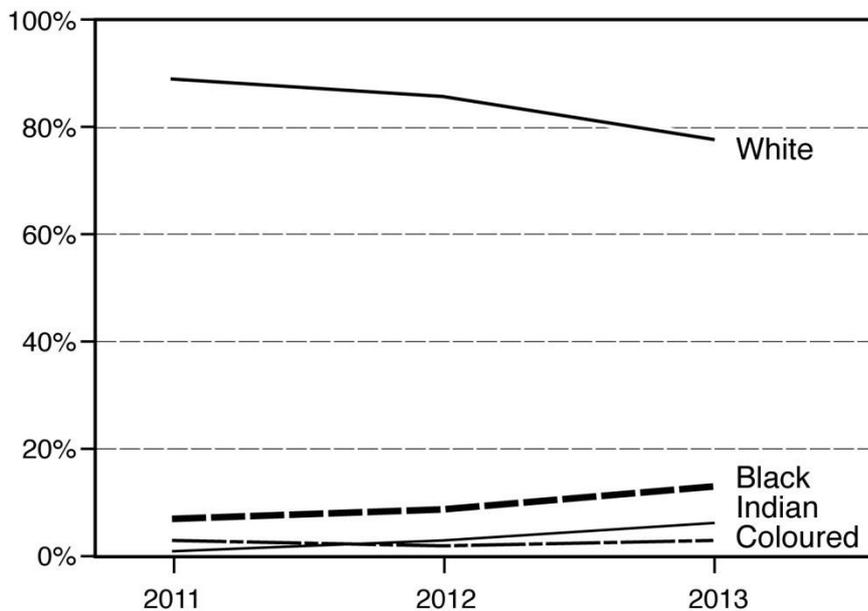


Figure 2. *Changing racial complexion of matric festival participants, 2011–2013.*
(Source: Authors)

In terms of the gender of participants, data gathered for 2012–2013 reveals a consistent trend of 58–59% male and 41–42% female attendees. The racial complexion of matric vac attendees is clearly not representative of the school leaving population of South Africa. Although the majority of current South African matriculants are comprised of Black (African) school leavers, the overwhelming group of matric vac attendees are currently white school leavers. Figure 2 shows estimates of the racial share of matric vac attendees for the KwaZulu-Natal festivals for the period 2011–2013. This reveals that whites represent at least three-quarters of festival attendees. The predominance of white school leavers in this rite of passage event reflects both its historical origins as an exclusive phenomenon of white domestic tourism and in recent years of the

continued greater affluence of white school leavers as a whole as compared to other racial groups in South Africa. Organisers of the festival at Plettenberg Bay reflected that it was “unfortunately a white-based event” which ultimately “catered for those who are able to afford it” (Jacobs, 2014).

The second largest group of participants are Black (African) matriculants. Over the period 2011–2013 there has been a progressive shift to an expanding share of Black (African) school leavers participating at this rite of passage youth festival. This rise in Black participation is inseparable from the growing affluence of Black communities in South Africa since democratic transition and most significantly of a rapidly expanding middle class and elite class which are often referred to as ‘Black diamonds’ (Simpson and Dore 2008; Donaldson et al 2013). Many of these newly affluent Black middle and elite groups choose to educate their children at expensive private schools or secure entry to the more prestigious government schools. Overall it is apparent that the two smallest racial groups in terms of participation in the matric vac festivals are those classed as members of South Africa’s Indian or Coloured (mixed-race) communities. From Figure 2 an upturn is recorded, however, in the participation of (mainly affluent) Indian school leavers in matric vac celebrations.

Financial considerations are a critical determinant of participation at the matric vac festivals. Interviews with the two key event organisers disclosed that: “It all comes down to Rands and cents” (Jacobs 2014) and that simply “It is a matter of finance” (Walsh, 2014). It is significant that on average 78% of sampled attendees had future plans to study at tertiary institutions whilst another 14% planned to embark on a gap year or a form of working holiday (Rage Stats Presentation, 2013). These findings underscore the fact that the matric vac and especially the Rage Festival caters for individuals of higher affluence. At Plettenberg Bay it is estimated by the events company that school leavers from South Africa’s elite private schools represent an estimated 60 percent of all festival attendees. Attendees at government schools represent the remaining 40 percent of festival goers (Jacobs 2014). This predominance of private school pupils is a finding that underlines once again the role of financial considerations in determining attendee participation at this youth festival. At the KwaZulu-Natal festivals at Umhlanga Rocks and Ballito, organisers suggest an even distribution of attendees between private and government schools. However, as government schools tend to be larger than the elite private schools, the proportion of attendees from private schools is substantially higher than from government schools (Walsh 2014). Of the top ten schools in terms of attendees the majority are drawn from elite private schools based either in Gauteng (mainly Johannesburg) or Kwazulu-Natal. Event organisers point out that nationally a large percentage of school matriculants – mainly those in rural areas dominated almost exclusively by poor disadvantaged Black students - are unaware of these festivals whilst others are unable to attend because of cost considerations.

It is estimated there are certain cultural variations in attendance at particular festivals. In particular, the Plettenberg Bay festival attracts a higher proportion of

Afrikaans-speaking school leavers as compared to the predominance of English speakers at the festivals in Umhlanga Rocks and Ballito. This differentiation is reinforced by the policies of event organisers to provide a more diverse live entertainment at Plettenberg Bay, including of Afrikaans musicians and deejays, than is the case at the more traditionally English dominated festivals in KwaZulu-Natal where entertainment is mainly by local and international electronic music deejays. In terms of geographical source of attendees, again certain differences are observed. The Plettenberg Bay festival attracts large numbers of school leavers from schools based in the Western Cape (especially Cape Town) and Eastern Cape (mainly Port Elizabeth and Grahamstown) and draws also substantial flows from Afrikaans medium schools in Pretoria and from across the Free State. Most attendees – an estimated 85 percent - travel to Plettenberg Bay either by self-drive or public bus; the high cost of flying means that only the most affluent school leavers use this transportation mode. The KwaZulu-Natal festivals at Ballito and Umhlanga Rocks draw from other source markets especially Johannesburg and in the case of Ballito particularly from Durban and the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands. For many affluent private school leavers from Johannesburg, travel to Durban from Johannesburg is by air.

4.3 ORGANISATIONAL DYNAMICS

An understanding of the organizational dynamics of the matric vac is crucial to interpreting its growing popularity as a rite of passage youth festival. Indeed, it is argued here that the event organisers of this South African festival have evolved a suite of 'harm minimization' or containment strategies in order to address the potential for locally disruptive behaviour linked to this rite of passage youth festival.

At the heart of the control mechanisms implemented by event organisers is the introduction of a 'passport' system which attendees purchase for participation at both the Plett Rage as well as the Rage Festivals in coastal KwaZulu-Natal. The passport system was introduced in 2007 as part of the institutionalisation and consolidation of matric vac. The main purpose of a passport purchase is to provide attendees with controlled entrance to all the associated Matric Rage parties that occur during the 10 day long youth festival. These 'Matric Rage' passports are sold throughout the year by the events companies and can be followed on Facebook and Twitter.

The respective organisational companies, however, manage the sales of passports differently. Both organisers implement what they call a Rage Agent or 'Ragent' programme albeit these programmes operate differently under each company. For the Matric Rage festival in KwaZulu-Natal, festival organizers assign 'Rage Agents' to over 300 schools in order to sell passports to potential school leavers. A rage agent is a selected learner from each high school who represents his or her particular school. These Ragents are responsible for

communication between the schools and the Rage Festival and are used as a communication platform by event organisers. Sales begin as early as February-March with the majority of passports sold out in the first few months. During 2012 festival passports cost between R650-R1400 and escalated in 2014 up to R2750, which includes entertainment and transport to venues. Payment is made online.

For the Plett Rage event, one designated Cape Town based company controls all sales of the passports. The Plett Rage Freedom Pass is marketed as a passport to “destination freedom” once completing school. In 2014 the cost of the pass included: access to partner clubs, bars, beach activities, shows and parties, discounts at partner restaurants and shops as well as transport from Rage Village to entertainment/parties. As part of the control system each passport is bar coded with the name of the participant, the South African official identity number and the attendees’ cellphone contact number. As Plett Rage does not provide attendees with the option of purchasing pre-sold tickets for individual events, the Plett Rage Freedom Pass is most commonly purchased by school-leavers attending this festival.

With the purchase of the Plett Rage Freedom Pass attendees are given a voucher booklet as well as a ‘goodie bag’. The voucher booklet provides attendees with discounts in the form of coupons that can be redeemed at affiliated local business outlets. The businesses form part of what is known as the Plett Rage ‘Friends of the Festival’ which has been functioning since 2008. The ‘Friends of the Festival’ perform a dual role for festival attendees. In addition to furnishing goods discounts and special pricing to attendees, the local businesses involved also provide safe house facilities for attendees in need. As described by one local business owner: “Being part of the friends of the festival the business also informally provides an area of safety for attendees if necessary - if a kid comes in and they’re in trouble, it’s an open door, come in and you’re safe”.

Control and safety considerations in relation to attendees are paramount across the organisation of the festival (Jacobs, 2014). The festival goes personal details are also bar-coded on to a wristband that all Rage attendees wear allowing speedy access to clubs and venues but also enabling the organizers to identify a Rager in case of an emergency. Indeed, since 2012 the focus of event organisers has become increasingly that of marketing to attendees’ parents as in the majority of cases they are ultimately responsible for payment of costs. As these festivals may represent the first time that the child has been allowed to leave home unaccompanied, event organisers stress that the festival be as safe and ‘parent friendly’ as possible not least in terms of parent ‘peace of mind’ (Walsh, 2014). One dimension of safety which is linked to control is the concentration since 2013 of the Rage Festival events at only a select few primary venues which can cater for up to 10 000 attendees with strict crowd control measures in place allowing for better levels of security. The main arena for celebration is a dedicated venue termed the Sound Factory which is set up on a sports field and includes three dance floors, massive stages, numerous food stalls, a beer garden, bars and a medical tent.

Of critical importance is the organisational innovation from 2009 of a dedicated transport system for festival attendees which is essential to counter the dangers of drunk-driving. Festival organisers are strongly opposed to attendees using their own vehicles for transport to and from party events. The operating transport system includes at KwaZulu-Natal resorts the use of a dedicated fleet of 80 mini-bus vehicles for the festival duration in order to ensure that “no one drives” (Walsh 2014). Festival organisers use local taxi services as drivers and do roadworthy certification of vehicles to ensure maximum safety. Festival sponsors also assist with transport services; for example Converse sneakers runs a campaign that any attendees wearing a pair of their shoes would be able to use their free transport facilities. Overall, the efficiency of the transport service is central to the Festival in order to reduce the risk of drunk-driving incidents and assist in ensuring attendee safety.

Additional safety-related measures are put in operation, including medical service facilities on standby and strict policies on drugs with room checks occurring at popular festival accommodation venues. In addition, the local authorities assist with the appointment of security staff for event security with special measures implemented at nightclubs and party locations by personnel described as “knowing how to deal with Matrics and parties”. At Plettenberg Bay further safety measures are implemented with the assistance of an Australian-based Christian volunteer organisation known as Red Frogs who aim to assist inebriated festival-goers and those who may be lost during the festival celebrations. The 60–80 members of the Red Frogs work in teams to provide lifts home for drunken party-goers, emotional and counselling services as well as offering a safe house in a local church where individuals can stay and be looked after at no cost if they are unable to get back to their place of accommodation or found too intoxicated to give any personal details.

5. CONCLUSION

For tourism scholars festival tourism opens up a wide agenda for research. At present the existing scholarship on festival tourism is heavily weighted towards studies in North America, Europe and increasingly Australia (Getz 2010; Getz and Page 2015). Research on youth festivals is relatively unexplored in tourism scholarship surrounding the global South. This article contributes to festival tourism scholarship in two major directions. First, it moves the focus to South Africa, one of the rising destinations within the global South for a range of cultural and other festivals that are linked to local economic and community development. Second, the paper analyses a neglected form of festival tourism, namely rite of passage festivals and addresses. The study on the matric vac shows that this festival is mainly attended by affluent, white youth in South Africa.

From this empirical examination it is evident that South Africa's youth matric vac festival exhibits close parallels to Schoolies Week in Australia and Spring

Break in the USA. In common with these two events the matric vac festival in South Africa has been marked in its evolution from an initially informal to a formalized festival through the entrepreneurial activities of the festival event organizers. This South African festival has been shown as concentrated spatially at a small number of coastal destinations where common themes are the provision of beach entertainment, organized parties, night clubbing and live acts for school leavers as a rite of passage. Certain differences are noted between the various destinations in the cultural mix of attendees and how the festival is organized. Nevertheless, of great significance are the seeming differences between the organizational dynamics of this South African youth festival as compared to Schoolies Week or Spring Break. Arguably, the South African festival organizers have innovated several mitigation or containment strategies in order to ensure maximum safety and security of attendees as well as to counter any potential resident resistance towards the hosting of such local events. To a large extent these measures have been highly successful as judged by the minimal negative local perceptions which are expressed towards the matric vac celebrations. Indeed, the specific organizational dynamics and highly controlled experience of this rite of passage youth festival are a business model that the event organizers now are potentially considering for export and roll out beyond South Africa (Walsh 2014)

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