THE PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT OF UMKHOSI WOMHLANGA (REED DANCE) AS A TOURISM ENTERPRISE IN KWAZULU-NATAL: POLICIES, PRACTICES AND PERCEPTIONS.
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Introduction
Successful events do not happen by chance, the event organizers, event managers or organizing committees require comprehensive knowledge, skills in planning and management, good intuition and eye for beauty (Wolf, 2005). Historical trends indicate that the event industry, particularly ceremonial events is not a completely new domain. Special events of different kinds were celebrated ages ago in a form of religious festivals and ritual ceremonies as milestones for particular communities. We can always wonder how the event organizers of that time hosted these events as little has been documented about them.

Events vary in terms of their size, impact and significance. What is common in all events is that, their success depends mostly on their planning and management. Events that are not strategically planned and managed result in the production of unsuccessful events which will dent the image of the event itself, the reputation of the organizers and even the host destination or community (Tassiopoulos, 2005).

The researcher, through this study, intends to investigate how uMkhosi Womhlanga is planned and managed to ensure that its tourism potential is maximized. Furthermore, the researcher intends to find out about policy frameworks in place that govern the event as well as practices and perceptions of all stakeholders linked to this colourful event. This study is still in progress. The researcher hopes that upon completion the findings and recommendations to be made will be of value to the production of the event in future.

Background of the study
uMkhosi Womhlanga, also known as the Reed Dance, is a ceremony celebrated by the Zulu nation once every year, in September. The event takes place at the King of the Zulu’s royal residence at eNyokeni palace. Thousands of Zulu maidens and visitors gather at the King’s palace to celebrate this ceremony and it has become more popular over the years.

The aim of this ceremony is for maidens to celebrate their purity, showcasing that they are proud of their bodies while they are being prepared for womanhood, thus giving the king and the nation to marvel at, appreciate and motivate the young maidens through lexis and cheer. According to the Zulu tradition only virgins are supposed to take part in the ceremony, which marks their purity. If the young maiden carrying the reed is no longer a virgin the reed will break, thus
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embarrassing the maiden and her entire family in public. During this event, maidens wear colourful beads, sing and do Zulu dancing for the king and the nation. [www.zulu.org.za (2008)].

Due to the high standard at which events are now staged thoughtful planning, management and evaluation have become essential requirements. Events contribute significantly to any country, economically and socio-culturally. It is important to note that the impact of hosting an event, especially on the environment must be strictly monitored and controlled to ensure the sustainable use of resources. It is vital to conduct an environmental impact assessment (EIA) for any event in order to assess and plan for any potential impacts on the environment, socio-economic conditions and cultural heritage, especially for events that have major physical impacts, (Tassiopoulos, 2005).

Events have a potential of attracting tourists to the host destination hence there is what is called event tourism. This is the case with uMkhosi Womhlanga (Reed dance), it has a great potential of attracting tourists and generating revenue for the host communities of KwaNongoma, KwaZulu–Natal and South Africa as a country depending on the interests of visitors or event tourists. Tassiopoulos (2005) believes that it is essential to develop a framework which will ensure that planning and management of events is focused, co-ordinated and aligned to other areas of tourism development and rural management. uMkhosi Womhlanga, like any other event, either organizational, personal, leisure or cultural events should yield certain benefits for the host community and contribute to the economic development of the region.

Events vary in terms of their size, impact and significance. What is common in all events is that, their success depends mostly on their planning and management. Events that are not strategically planned and managed become a fiasco, which will dent the image of the event itself, the reputation of the organizers and even the host destination or community (Tassiopoulos, 2005). The researcher through this study intends to investigate how this event is planned and managed to ensure that its tourism potential is maximized. Furthermore, the researcher intends to find out about policy frameworks in place that govern the event as well as practices and perceptions of all stakeholders linked to this colourful event.

More emphasis should be focused on planning and management of an event to guarantee its success. Shone (2004) emphasizes financial planning, good and careful financial control as the most important aspects of the event management process. He further argues that good financial control is vital even for events that are not intended for profit making.

Continuing to celebrate this traditional ceremony of uMkhosi Womhlanga, it is important to understand the aim and the reasons for the event as initiated by Zulu
nation’s forefathers. Even though the planning and management of the event maybe totally different from that of the initial stages due to modern changes, the planning and management has to be stringently performed to keep up with the world standards.

The aim and objectives of the study
This study seeks to find out about the planning and management of this ceremonial event, uMkhosi Womhlanga, through the following objectives:

a) To find out whether local communities understand the meaning and objectives of celebrating uMkhosi Womhlanga as a traditional and ceremonial event;
b) To find out about policies governing the planning and management of the event;
c) To ascertain the extent of planning and management of the event in ensuring its success;
d) To identify participation patterns/levels of local communities in the event;
e) To investigate whether the local communities benefit from the event;
f) To explore the tourism potential of the event in relation to the events and
g) To establish the current practices and perceptions of stakeholders and surrounding communities about uMkhosi Womhlanga.

Literature review
This study is still in progress. In terms of literature, very little ground has been covered so far, the challenge that the researcher is faced with is that very little information is documented especially for traditional ceremonies celebrated for young girls.

In Kwa-Zulu Natal, the Zulu nation celebrates uMkhosi Womhlanga (Reed dance) at Enyokeni Royal palace where young maidens gather dressed in colorful beads, singing and dancing. This event lasts for four days. On the first day maidens arrive, day two they wake up and go down to Ntsonyane River to bathe and move up to their marquee to practice and prepare for the following day, day three they have their bath at Ntsonyane River, regroup at oSuthu palace to pick up the reed (harvested from KwaSokhulu area) before proceeding up to eNyokeni palace to present the reeds to the king. After that they move down to the arena for speeches and Zulu dancing. On day four, maidens wake up early to bathe at Ntsoyane River, before moving up to the arena to sing and dance for the king and nation. On this day different groups from different districts showcase their bead, song and Zulu dance styles. After the festivities the king bids farewell to all present and people depart. In the Zulu culture, it is the Zulu princesses that pick up the reeds first and lead the maidens to the palace and the princess to present the first reed to the king
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is the one who has just received her first periods. Still to come is the Ngwavuma, Northern KZN Reed dance early next month.

In Swaziland the Reed dance is celebrated differently from the Reed dance in KZN. The maidens travel to cut the reeds at night, hence they carry torches to symbolize that. It is the royal princess that presents the first reed to the Queen mother. In Swaziland the king is just a guest and is expected to choose a wife. The maiden is chosen at Ludzidzini reed dance only to be revealed at Shiselweni reed dance by standing along the royal princesses, but wearing a different traditional attire. Royal princesses wear red feathers (Ligwalagwala bird) on their heads. If the royal princess is not available to lead the maidens the Induna yetintfombi (leader of the maidens) can take her place.

In Zambia, a three-nation traditional ceremony of the Chewa people of eastern Zambia is celebrated. It is known as the Kulamba festival, which lasts for five days. The Kulamba traditional ceremony of the Chewa people is held every August near Katete town. The Kulamba traditional ceremony is also an annual initiation ceremony for young teenage girls who are about to join the celebrated womanhood. The important function of the Kulamba is the girls’ initiation ceremony. As Kulamba is celebrated “Anamwali,” the young teenage girls who come of age leave their confinement home where they would have spent time learning life skills and responsibilities of adult womanhood. The new graduates aged between 13 to 19 years, bare-breasted and painted in bright colours dance in the main arena. When dancing the girls go down on knees and sit on their heels while gyrating their waists. It’s a great display of rhythm and coordinated movement [www.zambia-the-african-safari.com (2008)]. Review of more and relevant literature is still in progress.

**Methodology to be used to collect research data**

The study area for this study is KwaZulu-Natal, which has 11 districts, the sample data will be collected from only 5 districts, Umkhanyakude, Zululand, Amajuba, Umzinyathi and uThungulu as shown in Figure 1.

A quota sampling method coupled with random sampling will be used to select respondents for the communities’ and maidens’ questionnaire. Purposive sampling will be used to select respondents for both the tourists, the officials and services providers’ questionnaires. Data collected will be analyzed and interpreted electronically using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) computer programme. Bar graphs, tables and pie charts will be created through the programme to represent findings from respondents.
**FIGURE 1**

(Source: [http://devplan.kzntl.gov.za/MapsGis/town_planning_schemes.asp](http://devplan.kzntl.gov.za/MapsGis/town_planning_schemes.asp))

**2008 KZN Reed Dance Experience**

The reed dance has become very popular about 30 000 maidens participated this year. Based on my observation a lot of planning went into production of the event, making it possible even though there were minor gaps which needed attention in order to ensure the smooth flow of the event as a whole.

**Aspects that needs attention**

- Time management.
- Access control.
- Audience control.
- Seating arrangement (the Kings'entourage).
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- Clear directions for guests.
- Events calendar.

Conclusion
The study is still in progress. The hypotheses stated above are still to be accepted or rejected, after extensive collection of data on the field both from officials involved in the planning and management of uMkhosi Womhlanga and other respondents made up of service providers, local communities and tourists, in the successive chapters. The researcher hopes that the findings and recommendations still to be suggested will be of value to the production of uMkhosi Womhlanga in future.

References


