

## Contemporary issues in event management [1]

Welcome to the *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Insights*' (*JHTI*) special issue on Event Management Research: a tribute to Dr Mathilda van Niekerk. Dr Mathilda van Niekerk and I were the founding editors of *JHTI*. She was also the managing editor of the *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* (*IJCHM*). I tried to acknowledge and reflect her contributions to both journals as well as her personality and approach to research in my editorials (Okumus, 2020a, b). While launching *JHTI* and working with her, she made sure that *JHTI*'s first editorial board was diverse (e.g. more than 50% of female representation) and international. We would support junior researchers and scholars from developing countries and regions, particularly from Africa. She was always excited and happy to receive submissions to *JHTI* (and also *IJCHM*) in event management. After Mathilda's passing in August 2019, Dr Jeannie Hahm, Dr Karin Weber, Prof. Don Getz and Prof. Rhodri Thomas kindly agreed to guest edit a special issue in event management research as a tribute to her. In addition to being Mathilda's close friends, our guest editors are leading scholars in the event management field and worked with Mathilda on research projects. I would like to sincerely thank our guest editors for putting together this very strong and timely special issue. The articles included in this special issue should be well received by scholars, students and practicing managers in our field. I am sure Mathilda would have been very happy with this special issue as well as *JHTI*'s outstanding progress over the past four years. *JHTI* is now included in the Emerging Citation Index and Scopus. *JHTI* received 246 submissions in 2020 and 90 submissions so far in 2021. I am confident that *JHTI* will become one of the top-tier journals in the hospitality and tourism field. In short, among Mathilda's legacies, *JHTI* will be one of the important ones. Rest in peace Mathilda! You are always missed and remembered!

**Fevzi Okumus**  
*Editor-in-Chief*

## Warmth, ambition and leadership in event management research: a tribute to Dr Mathilda van Niekerk

This special issue is created to pay tribute to the late Dr Mathilda van Niekerk who served as the Managing Editor of the *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* (*IJCHM*) and the Founding Co-Editor of the *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Insights* (*JHTI*). She was also the Guest Editor of the first special issue related to events that was published in *IJCHM* in 2017. The tremendous contributions she made to the advancement of both journals, and the dedicated and caring support she offered authors from diverse backgrounds, have been acknowledged by her editorial partner, University of Central Florida colleague and friend, Prof. Fevzi Okumus (Okumus, 2020a, b).

In addition to enabling many others, Mathilda contributed immensely in her own right to cutting edge research and education in the field of event management and related fields. Indeed, she was the author or coauthor of more than 100 internationally recognized papers. Her scholarship was conspicuously informed by the various industry leadership positions she held prior to joining academia. Becoming the cluster leader in Nelspruit, South Africa, overseeing the marketing, communication and events in the area during the 2010 FIFA World Cup, was particularly influential. Mathilda's professional background, coupled with her personal values, also led her to advocate strongly for better community participation models so that the benefits gained from hosting events could be shared. These experiences also



reinforced her belief that papers published in academic journals should not only offer theoretical contributions but contain valuable practical implications.

Yet, despite her achievements, it is probably Mathilda's enthusiasm, passion and sensitivity that come to mind for most of those from around the world who encountered her. A true positive force of nature, despite the very difficult health challenges she faced; she was always ready to encourage, nurture and ultimately, inspire, with no obstacle seemingly too big as not to try overcoming it. The many heartfelt tributes from students, colleagues and friends expressed after Mathilda's passing are testimony to this.

On a personal level, each of us had the pleasure of contributing to what was probably one of Mathilda's final masterclasses in practical event management. She led the team organizing the 4th International Conference on Events (ICE) in Orlando in December 2017 with flair and from the front! Her colleagues and delegates were reminded of the part they needed to play with much humor and enthusiasm. Not only was the program stimulating but she also ensured that networks were developed inclusively regardless of rank or background. At the successful conclusion of this conference, it was announced that the subsequent ICE would be hosted in Cape Town, in her home country of South Africa. Sadly, she would only be able to join in spirit, yet, her legacy remains.

### **The special issue in the context of the global pandemic**

Event-specific research was in its infancy in 1993 when the first dedicated journal, *Festival Management and Event Tourism* (now *Event Management*), published its first issue. Since then several other journals devoted to event research and event studies have flourished, and many other fields, including tourism and hospitality, frequently publish event-related papers. Special issues, such as this current event-themed issue, help advance the field by attracting a wider audience and broader participation.

It is possible to say that the field has matured, but it continues to evolve. Most recently the global pandemic has forced a re-thinking of many assumptions, strategies and research priorities, and no doubt there will be structural changes in society and the world economy that lead to new and important lines of research and debate.

The widespread adoption of virtual and hybrid events during the past year is bound to have a profound influence on the entire events sector. The pandemic has forced a rethinking of some of the basic beliefs and practices within events, tourism, hospitality and leisure, especially as to the nature of risk, uncertainty, and the meaning of sustainability and resilience. Perhaps the cancellation and postponement of so many events around the world, with organizational and venue failures, will shift the emphasis of many scholars and institutions away from neoliberal growth models and reaffirm the need to stress benefits to residents and communities.

The COVID-19 pandemic will accelerate debates on the multiple value perspectives that have spurred growth in the number, types, size, cost and impacts of planned events. When resilience and sustainability are discussed it makes little sense to consider only single events. Again, the pandemic crisis will undoubtedly accelerate changes in how various public agencies and private corporations approach funding, planning and return on investment. Individual event organizations, including the numerous not-for-profits, will have to refocus on basics and especially on how they work within networks and formal event portfolios. Healthy populations of events in cities and destinations should become a major research topic.

### **The papers in this issue**

In this special issue, we present five papers that provide cutting-edge research in the field of events. The topics include cannabis festivals, social media followers, virtual reality (VR)

adoption, professional identity and community of practice. The authors used diverse data collection methods (e.g. surveys, interviews) in both quantitative and qualitative research and analyzed data utilizing various techniques and programs (e.g. ANOVA, regression, content analysis, narrative inquiry, thematic analysis). The papers in the collection provide a global perspective by investigating data from China, the United Kingdom and the United States. In the following, we share brief summaries of the papers in this special issue. The lineup of papers starts with contemporary research in festivals, the type of event Mathilda was most attracted to, along with mega events and ends with a focus on the event management community, where her passion remained.

The first paper, entitled “A cannabis festival in urban space: visitors’ motivation and travel activity” by [Kang and Lee \(2021\)](#), explored a niche segment. The authors classified cannabis festival attendees based on motivation and travel activities. This quantitative study used data collected from 392 out-of-state visitors to a cannabis festival in Denver, Colorado, and profiled them using latent class analysis, ANOVA and cross-tabulation. The results showed that festival visitors categorized into four latent groups by motivation and three latent groups by travel activity. This study can be considered seminal in the context of cannabis tourism while providing an understanding of out-of-state visitors’ motivation and travel behaviors while attending a cannabis festival. The authors shared important practical implications for event organizers, event promoters and cannabis tourism businesses.

In the second study, “Behavioral study of social media followers of a music event: a case study of a Chinese music festival” by [Chen and Lei \(2021\)](#), the authors focused on investigating social media followers to the Strawberry Music Festival in China. Most of existing social media in events research has concentrated on Western platforms and festivals. Therefore, this study provided new perspectives in that sense. An online survey was used to collect data from 190 social media followers (WeChat and Weibo) to understand their browsing and participation behaviors based on hedonic and utilitarian motivations. The authors found that both hedonic and utilitarian motivation have significant impacts on browsing and participation behaviors. Furthermore, these behaviors affected the intentions to attend an event and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM).

The third paper by [Soifer et al. \(2021\)](#) is entitled “Virtual site visits for meeting and event planning: are US convention facilities ready?”. This timely study examined the rate of VR and other technologies adopted by convention facilities to enable virtual site visits. This study was based on diffusion of innovation theory and also provided predictive models of virtual site visit tool adoption via probability distributions. A content analysis of 369 convention facility websites was conducted. The type of information gathered included photos, floor plans, videos, 360-photos, 360-tours and VR-optimized tours. Results showed that VR-optimized tours are the least adopted form, followed by 360-tours and standard videos. The majority of facilities have been using photos and floor plans. Three predictive models forecasted that convention facilities would achieve a 50% adoption rate of 360-degree photos in 3–4.67 years and 4.42–6.62 years for 360-degree tours.

The fourth study, entitled ““I am not a party planner!”: setting a baseline for event planners’ professional identity construction before and during COVID-19” by [Ponting \(2021\)](#) explored the professional identity (PID) construction process of event professionals in an effort to elevate the professional status. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 18 event professionals before COVID-19 and 14 were additionally interviewed during the pandemic. Based on the narrative framework, five themes emerged. Before the pandemic, event professionals stressed self-driven pride and social-driven stigmatization as part of the PID. Before and during the pandemic, profession-driven was recognized more. During the pandemic, situational reality-driven work skills and community-driven commitment were central narratives of PID. The authors shared practical implications for event professionals and event management.

The final paper is a qualitative study, entitled “Events management as a community of practice.” The authors, [Brown and Stokes \(2021\)](#), considered events conceptually as a community of practice. They conducted 25 in-depth semi-structured interviews with event professionals in the United Kingdom and collected additional data by surveying 215 event professionals. Based on an interpretive and inductive approach, events management was depicted as a domain, which connected event professionals to a community where knowledge, ideas and concepts are shared and developed. Several themes emerged from the analysis that event professionals utilized to maintain and enhance knowledge and practice: shared values, identity and norms, belonging to a community, artifacts, processes and practice, and evaluation and learning. In a practical sense, the authors shared opportunities for event professionals to connect with others and to enhance their skills through education and certification.

### Concluding remarks

The global COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound effect on the events sector. It is too early to tell what the long-term implications will be but we have no doubt that Mathilda would have responded with verve to the new reality. We suspect she would have led debates on the need for a new research agenda, revised courses and different kinds of academic debate. We pay tribute to her memory by showcasing contemporary research in event management in this special issue.

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### Note

1. Some parts of this editorial are published in the Special Issue: Contemporary Issues in Event Management in the *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*.

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