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DIWALI IN DUNEDIN: A CASE STUDY OF FESTIVALISATION AND INTERVENTION IN INDIAN CULTURAL PERFORMANCE IN NEW ZEALAND

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Abstract

This article presents an ethnographic case study that discusses the festivalisation process of a public Diwali festival as celebrated in the southern city of Dunedin, Aotearoa New Zealand. In Aotearoa, support for Diwali festivals has spread with the growth and diversity of the Indian diaspora, including both top-down and ground-up backing. Differences in the urban location and demographic makeup of the Indian population have resulted in annual cultural festivals with major variations in size and scope. This has produced festivals with distinct governance structures that affect the organisational structure, participants, size and nature of the audience, and styles of performances. In this article, focus is given to the growing visibility of Diwali in Dunedin in terms of the interconnection of a festivalisation process in the national cultural sphere, and the intervention of key local individuals who work from the ground up to make the festival happen. We ask two main questions as a way of attempting to comprehend New Zealand's contemporary engagement with Diwali and how it is played out in a relatively small city in comparison to the large-scale events in the country's largest city, Auckland. How has Diwali become a form of festivalised culture? What role has intervention played in establishing the event? A new theoretical model is presented to assist in the developing of event portfolios by considering the strategic relationships between the host city, community and festival stakeholders.

Keywords: Diwali, Dunedin, festivalisation, intervention

Introduction

A Saturday afternoon in late October 2019 and Dunedin's lower central plaza known as the Octagon is filling up with people attending the open-air public performances of music, song and dance in celebration of the Hindu "Festival of Lights", Diwali. The Otago Museum on the other side of town hosted several cultural performances and displays in the morning, and the Dunedin Public Art Gallery in the Octagon had information stalls and artwork exhibited as part of the day-long event. Along one side of the main road cutting through the centre of the Octagon for about 80 metres, food vendors were selling a range of Indian cuisine, and crowds were gathering as a DJ played Indian music as a cultural soundscape to the event. On the paved performance space, the creative contributions were varied, ranging from traditional Indian singing

to Bollywood dance with backing track, and juxtaposing religious and secular musical styles. In recognition of the public multicultural milieu, Indian performances were complemented by contemporary *taiko* drumming with Japanese roots and global reach, which offered a visually and audibly dynamic opening to the event. The performances ran for about 90 minutes as members of the public came and went, listening, watching and experiencing the sound, vision and tastes of Dunedin's rendering of one of India's main festivals.

Over the past few decades, the celebration of Diwali in Aotearoa New Zealand has blossomed into a vibrant public display of multiculturalism and Indian identity (Booth, 2014; 2018; Johnson, 2007; 2010; Johnson & Figgins, 2005). As well as numerous festivities organised within distinct community organisations in various locations around the country, which sometimes overlap into the broader population, several noticeably public spectacles have been instituted in Auckland, New Zealand's largest city (population in 2018: 1.6M), and Wellington, New Zealand's capital (population in 2018: 514,000) (Statistics New Zealand, 2019a), at first in 2002 through the intervention of the Asia New Zealand Foundation (ANZF)¹ and the respective city councils. (Dunedin's resident population in 2018 was 126,000 [Statistics New Zealand, 2019a].) Comparable public manifestations of these extensive top-down Diwali festivals, managed by collaborative relationships at different political locations and levels (Maloney, Smith & Stoker, 2000), have emerged in other parts of the national ethnoscape, ranging in size and exposure, but sharing the national significance of Diwali as a relatively new and public display of New Zealand's contemporary cultural milieu.

New Zealand hosts a rapidly growing population and unique cultural makeup of residents with Indian cultural heritage. The historically cultural Gujarati and Punjabi residents have more recently been joined by Indo-Fijians (especially since the coups from 1987, 2000 and 2006) and more recently the changes in the skilled migration category (since 2003) have resulted in attracting a growing number of international students and skilled migrants arriving from major Indian centres, as well as other global locations that host the Indian diaspora.

New Zealand's Indian Population

The currently available Census data of 2018, subject to potential errors, suggests that there has been an additional growth to 4.7 percent of the current total New Zealand population of 5 million people or approximately 230,000 people of Indian cultural origin compared to 178,000 in 2016 (MigrationStats, 2019; World Population Review, 2020). India is the largest homeland for many of the skilled migrants, repatriated family members and international students. "By 2013 ongoing immigration from India had made this the largest place of origin, although India still only accounts for about 40 percent of the population, with another 30 percent from Fiji. Other countries of the Indian diaspora, such as South Africa and Malaysia, stand out as significant birthplaces" (Friesen, 2015, p. 21).

1 At the time called the Asia 2000 Foundation of New Zealand.

Equib, Dorigo and de Raad's (2020) report analyses the economic contribution of New Zealand's Indian population: "As one measure of the economic contribution of NZ Indians, we assign a share of national income of the different components of the economy's income (income from labour or work and capital or ownership of businesses) to people of Indian ethnicity. We estimate this was \$10b in 2019, largely made up of income earned from work, as well as profits of businesses owned by Indians.... This accounted for 3.3% of national GDP in 2019, up from 0.9% in 2001" (p. 25).

The New Zealand Indian community is concentrated in the largest urban centres with 71 percent of the total Indian population settled in Auckland, Christchurch and Wellington (Friesen, 2014, p. 143). A third of New Zealand's population of 5 million people live in Auckland (World Population Review, 2020). Auckland is ethnically diverse and the city's Indian community represents about 10 percent of Auckland's total population (Auckland Council, 2021).

Auckland's Indian population of over 160,000 is in stark contrast to the smaller city of Dunedin. The 2018 census notes the total percentage of the Asian population in Dunedin as 7.8 percent (9,840 people) of the city's total population, but does not identify cultural distinctions (e.g., Indian, Chinese, Japanese, etc) within the Asian category. Taking Dunedin's Indian community as 25 percent of the total Asian population, as per the national average, we can estimate the Indian population as being 2,467 (Statistics New Zealand, 2018) or 2 percent of Dunedin's total population.

Demographics

The majority of the New Zealand's Indian population are born overseas, and the majority of those born in New Zealand (65.7 percent) are children identified as under the age of 15 (Statistics New Zealand, 2019b). The unique Indian cultural make up includes a smaller proportion of those born in Fiji, identified in the Pacific Islands category in Table 1. English is spoken by 90.8 percent of the Indian population and 35.7 percent speak two or more languages (Statistics New Zealand, 2019b).

Table 2 identifies speakers from the ten major Indian language groups (over 1000 speakers) spoken by the Indian population. Linguistic affiliations from across the Indian subcontinent are represented with the majority of languages from the Indo-Aryan linguistic groups representing those of North Indian heritages and the smaller Dravidian linguistic group represents South Indian heritage (MigrationStats, 2019).

Both Auckland and Dunedin are home to universities that attract students and skilled migrants from India and across the Indian global diaspora. As identified by Booth, the majority of Indian residents in New Zealand are Hindi speakers and practice Hinduism. There has been an increase in Fiji-Hindi speakers, a significant rise in Panjabi speakers and Sikh community membership, and a growing number of Gujarati speakers (2018, pp. 280–281). The smaller South Indian communities with Tamil, Malayalam and Kannada roots are on the rise as well as Singhalese speakers from Sri Lanka. Cultural organisations, affiliated by language, gather in large community festivals such as Diwali, Holi, Eid, Guru Nanak, and Navaratri, and in smaller event settings such as concerts, plays, comedy nights, and social functions.

Table 1. New Zealand's Indian population by place of birth 2006–2018 (Statistics New Zealand, 2019b).

Birthplace	2006 (%)	2013 (%)	2018 (%)
New Zealand	23	23.5	23.8
Australia	0.4	0.3	0.3
Pacific Islands	28.8	27.5	21.1
United Kingdom and Ireland	0.7	0.7	0.6
Europe	0.1	0.1	0.1
North America	0.2	0.2	0.2
Asia	42.6	44.6	51.1
Middle East and Africa	4.3	3.1	2.6
Other	0	0	0

Table 2. Ten major language groups spoken by New Zealand's Indian community in 2018 (MigrationStats, 2019).

Linguistic Group	Language	Number of Speakers
Indo-Aryan	Hindi	69,471
Indo-Aryan	Panjabi	34,227
Indo-Aryan	Fiji-Hindi	26,805
Indo-Aryan	Gujarati	22,200
Dravidian	Tamil	10,107
Dravidian	Malayalam	9,024
Dravidian	Telegu	5,754
Indo-Aryan	Marathi	4,770
Indo-Aryan	Bengali	3,486
Dravidian	Kannada	1,692

Auckland has numerous cultural groups that represent a range of Indian ethnic and linguistic affiliations. Depending on the producer or organiser, events are presented in a variety of languages, including Hindi, Fiji-Hindi, Gujarati, Marathi, Panjabi, Sinhalese, Tamil, Malayalam, and/or English. Dunedin's Indian population has a strong South Indian cultural representation. The Dunedin Indian community is too small to support a temple. The Hindu Temple Society and the Dunedin Tamil Society (DTS) are active in the community and the University of Otago in Dunedin has functioning student associations that support cultural groups that might contribute cultural performances at the Diwali festivities. The size and homogenous nature of Dunedin's Indian population make the scale of community events easier to maintain community initiatives and leadership.

Diwali

In its diverse settings, Diwali is referred to as a *pūja*, as found in homes and temples, which is a term from Sanskrit meaning to worship, not as a festival. However, in the diaspora setting, Diwali is increasingly called a festival and open to celebration for all (Booth, 2015; Carnegie & Smith, 2006). In this way, Diwali has been transformed in locations such as New Zealand into an event whose focus is on ethnicity, and a showcase for the increasing gaze of the local non-Indian participants as well as out-of-town visitors (Wise, 2019; Wood, 2009).

In New Zealand, as in many other Indian diaspora settings, Diwali has been transformed from a social, family based, participatory event into an annual presentational festival that is produced publicly, especially in larger urban locations (including Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch, Hamilton, and Dunedin). Support for Diwali festivals in New Zealand has spread especially since the late twentieth century with the growth and diversity of the Indian diaspora. Differences in the urban location and demographic makeup of the Indian population have resulted in annual cultural festivals with major variations in size and scope. This has produced festivals with distinct governance structures that affect the organisational structure, participants, size and nature of the audience, and styles of performances (Figure 1). Of particular note are the ways Diwali has been festivalised through intervention, and characterised by ground-up and top-down approaches.

In 2019, New Zealand offered a plentiful choice of Diwali festivities, with events beginning Saturday 5 October and ending on Durga Puja, Saturday 26 October. In Auckland, Diwali events were presented around the city, and supported by local wards, community organisations, business associations and commercial enterprises. The four major Auckland Diwali festivities in 2019 – in comparison to the public Dunedin Diwali event that is the focus of this case study – were held in multiple locations attracting large audiences of a variety of cultural identities, community groups, performance genres, and business relationships. New Zealand's largest Diwali festivity, Auckland Diwali Festival (formally Auckland's Diwali Festival of Lights),² attracting an estimated

2 In its 18th year in 2019.

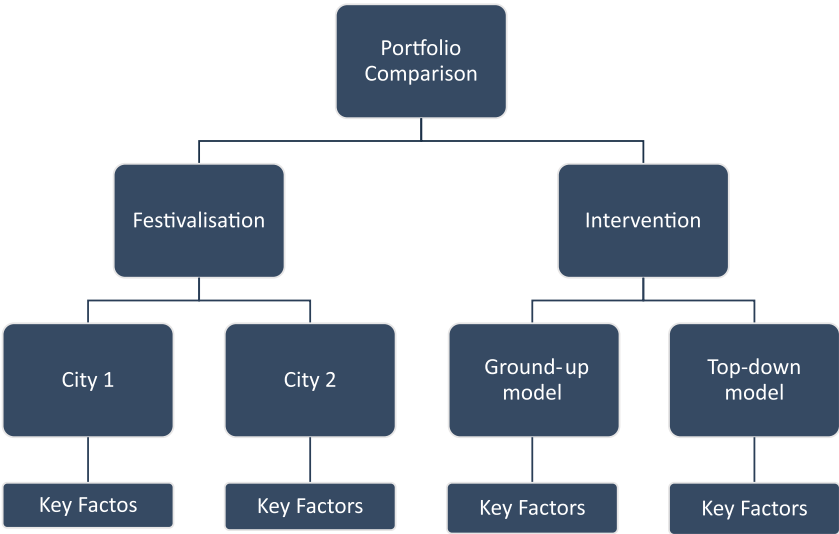


Figure 1: Festival and Intervention Comparison Model.

50,000 attendees over the weekend, is produced by Auckland Tourism, Event and Economic Development Limited (ATEED).³ The free event was held in Aotea Square two weeks before the official date for Diwali and attracted a large and ethnically diverse crowd. The Auckland Diwali Festival is the largest of its kind, is hugely popular, and is produced by local council staff in consultation with longstanding Indian community relationships. The main stages offered the opportunity for Indian cultural dance and music academies to showcase their students. Until 2019, funding through ANZF’s access to soft power support through the India Centre for Cultural Relations helped support performers and artists traveling from India.⁴ This Diwali festivity can be compared to the community generated and ticketed Diwali festival event in Auckland, featuring the Bollywood sensation, Sidhu Moosewala. This event filled the 10,000-seat Vodafone Event Centre with Panjabi families paying up to NZD250 per seat to attend a show by a local Panjabi entrepreneur on the main night of the Diwali *puja*. On this same day, however, yet representing local demographics and a growing regional response to Diwali, a Diwali festival in Dunedin’s Octagon was staged. Such vastly different event venues and production models help illustrate the complex notions of festivalisation, cultural representation, community objectives, and stakeholder relationships between local community, government authorities and international networks.

3 The organisation is the region’s economic development agency and is controlled by Auckland Council.

4 During fieldwork, the crowds and stallholders spoken to did not seem to notice the change to festival content.

While building on prior study of Diwali festivities in New Zealand over the past 16 years, and with much event ethnography at various national and local Diwali celebrations, the research for this article has included new interviews that were undertaken in 2019 with key participants who have been pivotal in making the Dunedin Diwali event possible over the past 10 years or so. In this Dunedin context, we ask two main questions as a way of attempting to comprehend New Zealand's contemporary engagement with Diwali and how it is played out in a relatively small city in comparison to the large-scale events in the country's largest city, Auckland. How has Diwali become a form of festivalised culture? What role has intervention played in establishing the event? These are two clear spheres of meaning that help in comprehending Diwali's *raison d'être* in Dunedin. A study of each offers insight into how a regional and relatively small city population can create a Diwali celebration and turn it into a significant annual multicultural event.

Festivalisation

Most commonly, the idea of festivalisation “refers to the politics of big events and their political and economic consequences on the host environment.... Festivals and mega-events are increasingly being used as marketing tools by cities as well as by nations in order to promote themselves” (Booth, 2014, p. 26). The festivalisation of Diwali in New Zealand is at the heart of its celebration as a themed public event consumed by the broader community (Getz 2005, p. 21). Along with other Asian festivals such as the Chinese New Year and Lantern Festival, Diwali has been thrust into a public sphere in a “festivalscape” imbued with the idea of a “contact zone” (Pratt, 1991). As Mackley-Crump notes in connection with Pacific festivalisation in New Zealand, the idea of a festivalscape can help in comprehending “the cultural geographies of particular localities” (2012, p. 107). When looking at cultural festivals through a geographical lens, Cudny (2016) points out the importance of defining festivalisation in a cultural context. This model shifts the notion of festivalisation from the mega-event model of Roche (2011) to a cultural perspective that is central to our Diwali case study.

Within New Zealand's growing Indian ethnoscape in the 1990s, Diwali began to take on more of a public presence in Dunedin. While local organisations such as the Indian Cultural Society and other University of Otago affiliate societies, as well as community groups and individuals, would have private or family celebrations, Diwali soon began to be festivalised in the public domain. This is comparable to public and top-down organised festivals that celebrate the Chinese New Year, which, in Dunedin, have emerged as a result of the nation's growing Chinese population (Johnson, 2005). Even by the mid-1990s, as one informant noted, the emergence of publicly-displayed artwork at the time of Diwali was particularly noticeable: “I remember there was during Diwali one year ... the Trade Aid shop was in the Octagon at that time, and ... a group came together and created a rangoli, you know with ... coloured powders and things like that”.

The inaugural ANZF Diwali events in 2002 included “sponsorship locally and from overseas: decorations were provided by the Hindu Endowment Board in Singapore, and the Indian Council for Cultural Relations in Delhi provided the Nagaland Performing Group and a rod-and-string puppet troupe from Karnataka”

(Johnson and Figgins, 2005). These Diwali events have continued and grown, liaising with council and community groups. The shift in management in Auckland as a “super city” in 2013 and the establishment of ATEED in 2011 created an event portfolio that included Auckland’s Diwali. It should be emphasised that the ANZF Diwali Festivals in Auckland and Wellington were not the only Diwali events in these cities. The major difference between them, however, was that ANZF did not actively promote similar festivals outside of these two cities, and the Dunedin event had to rely primarily on other funding sources and interventions (discussed later).

Antchak and Pernecky (2017, p. 554) found when comparing Auckland, Wellington and Dunedin’s event portfolios that they were designed with quite different levels of ‘formality’. Dunedin’s smaller size and limited community resources allowed for less directionality in the portfolio, and this created more opportunity for community input in comparison with the larger cities of Auckland and Wellington. “In Dunedin, a relatively passive rhythmicity of the city portfolio was described as the overreliance on annual events. Interviewee D1 explained that, in Dunedin many events were organised because “we have always done them”. Such orientation lacks critical evaluation of event feasibility and relevance for current city objectives. Event planners clearly emphasised the need for strategic changes and a more proactive intervention of city authorities into the major events” (Antchak & Pernecky 2017, p. 558).

In 2019, Dunedin City Council implemented a five-year festival and event plan (Dunedin City Council, 2019), which reflected similar event strategies in Auckland and Wellington. In Dunedin, as a smaller regional urban centre that contrasts much with Auckland, public festivals such as Diwali are increasingly a part of the city’s festivalisation of its key cultural assets, and a reflection of its increasingly multicultural ethnoscape. As noted by Marilyn Anderson (Dunedin City Council’s community events co-ordinator) in response to planning for the 2017 Dunedin Diwali: “Organisers hoped to expand the Dunedin Diwali event out into a specially decorated Octagon, with an outdoor performance area and food stalls in the carriageway” (Harwood, 2017). Furthermore, the hosting of the event in the council-owned Dunedin Public Art Gallery, along with the Otago Museum, which receives council funding, helps show increasing local support for the public event.

Interventions

Since 1997, Diwali festivals have become not only public events that include performances of Indian culture, but also public demonstrations of the New Zealand government’s acknowledgement of and support for New Zealand’s Indian communities (Johnson, 2007; 2010). Generally, “Diwali festivals fall into two governance categories: those organised by local Indian community organisations and those organised by city councils and other government-sponsored agencies” (Booth, 2014, p. 140). As noted by Booth (2015; 2016), the Auckland Indian Association’s Diwali was the first such major public festival in New Zealand, which was held at their Gandhi Centre in central Auckland in 1998, followed by the Waitakere Indian Association, in West Auckland in 2000. These Diwali festivals, and others that appeared later, continue today with

varying levels of local governmental or top-down support. Auckland Council⁵ and various funding trusts support the Waitakere Diwali event, a festivity that focuses on Hindi language and Hindu cultural themes. Further, the Auckland Indian Association Diwali and the Auckland and Wellington Diwali events received annual funding through ANZF (from 2002 to 2018),⁶ along with the (Chinese) Lantern Festival (since 2000).

Figure 2 tracks such top-down level governmental agency support for the Diwali and Lantern Festivals from 2010 to the end of that financial support in 2018. The respective local councils assumed the management role of the festivals, which now rely on their own sponsorship relationships and funding resources. The funding levels reflect the New Zealand government's interest in establishing economic growth in India and China that peaked in 2011/12. As a public festival in Dunedin, Diwali emerged in the early 2000s in a similar, yet much smaller, way to the top-down driven ANZF Diwali festivals produced in Auckland and Wellington. The 2002 Diwali Festival of Lights in Auckland was produced by Jennifer King, the cultural manager at ANZF. She also helped create the Lantern Festival, which continues to be extremely popular and receives support from the Chinese community, sponsors and government agencies.

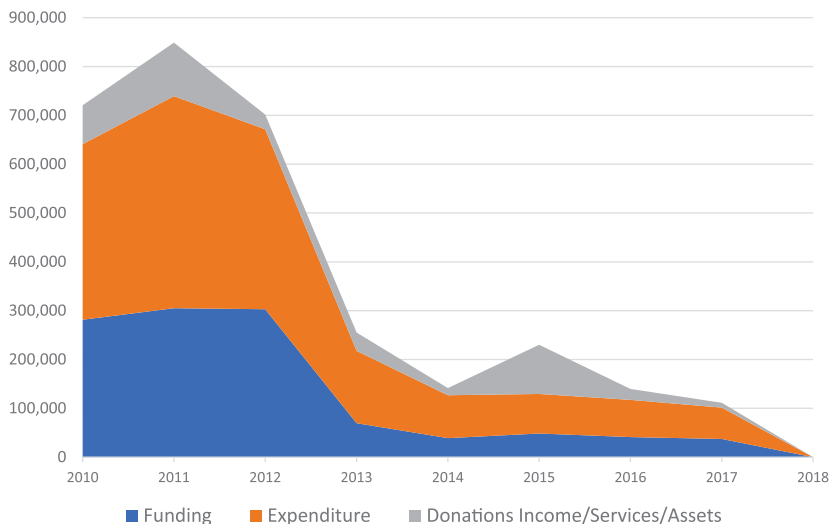


Figure 2: NZF Lantern and Diwali Festival Funding 2010–2018. Source: Asia New Zealand Foundation annual reports (Asia New Zealand Foundation 2009, 2011, 2012, 2014, 2017, 2019).

5 The Auckland Council was established in 2010 and replaced a number of smaller city councils.

6 The funding priorities of the Asia New Zealand Foundation were re-thought in 2018.

At the heart of Diwali in Dunedin is intervention. Local public Diwali celebrations have been based on ground-up intervention, as opposed to the top-down intervention that until 2018 dominated Auckland and Wellington events. However, with such a local approach, the role of individuals is determined by commitment and availability. In the early 2000s, a Dunedin organisation called IndiaNZ was driven by three local Indian women who were motivated to hold a public Diwali event. As one participant noted, “depending on who and what, what else is going on in their lives, ... they create things”. Subsequently, for several years Dunedin was lit up with various Diwali celebrations that took the festival into a new public domain. However, as one participant noted:

With ethnic communities and my experience in the short time ... with the DMEC [Dunedin Multi-Ethnic Council] is that very often ... ethnic communities are, don't necessarily stay, you know they, you have, for whatever reason people are moving and ... we had for a brief time someone who was very, she was very active in the Indian community and tried to organise things like Diwali and events like that ... but she left.

The festivalisation of Diwali in Dunedin in terms of a public celebration was consolidated in the early to mid 2000s by IndiaNZ, which emulated the Auckland and Wellington ANZF events, although on a much smaller scale and relying primarily on ground-up community support. Formed in 2005, the organisation IndiaNZ (Dunedin) ran the Dunedin public Diwali festival for several years from 2005 to 2011, although the organisation was short-lived due to one of its main figures falling ill. For the organisation's first two events, Diwali was held in the city's suburbs at Balmacewen Intermediate School (tickets cost \$2) and included Indian fashion and food. As noted during fieldwork by one of the organisers, in 2003, about 12 local Indian families got together to celebrate Diwali with a potluck dinner, although, while the local Indian Cultural Society (affiliated to the University of Otago) had events in the late 1990s, there were no public Diwali in Dunedin from at least 1999 through to 2004.

At one of their early events in 2007, including a smaller set of performances over two hours at the Dunedin Public Library, the main celebration was staged in the Regent Theatre in the Octagon from 5pm to 8pm as “Diwali Mela” (Hindu Festivity), and included 21 items in the programme. To begin with, there was a ritualistic lighting of the lamp, an address by K. P. Ernest as India's High Commissioner to New Zealand, and a range of cultural performances from the local Indian community. Of importance was the visit to Dunedin for Diwali by the Kalanjali Folk and Tribal Dance Academy from Andhra Pradesh in Southern India, who were also performing at the Auckland and Wellington celebrations as put on by ANZF, but sponsored for Dunedin not by ANZF but by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, thus showing that Diwali in this southern location was primary an activity concerning local community groups. This was the first time that Dunedin had experienced visiting performers from India coming to Dunedin especially for the event. For this particular event, sponsorship was gained from a number of donors, including the High Commission for India, Indian Council for Cultural Relations, Dunedin City Council, Creative Communities (Dunedin City), Caversham Foundation, and Community Trust of Otago.

In 2008, a similar celebration was held, this time in the Auditorium at the University of Otago College of Education. The event included the Nataraj Gosthi folk dance troupe from northeastern Assam in India, who were also visiting Auckland and Wellington for similar performances. As noted in a review of the celebration, the expenses needed were covered from institutional support and from generous locals: “The ‘close-knit’ Dunedin Indian community raised funds to cover the artists’ costs, and was assisted by the Dunedin City Council, Community Trust of Otago and Creative Communities scheme” (Stevens, 2008).

For the 2009 celebration, Dunedin’s Hutton Theatre at the Otago Museum was the location for a further aspect of the celebration with a series of performances by the Rajasthani Puppeteers, a visiting family from India performing Kathputli, a tradition of puppeteering that dates back 3000 years (Taylor, 2009). Also, from India, as part of the main event were performances by the Gujarati Saurashtra Lok Kala Kandra dance troupe. With an event at the University of Otago Childcare Association’s full-time centre in the afternoon, their main public performance was in the late afternoon at the College of Education auditorium on 24 October.

The event in 2010 was fortunate also to feature visiting performers from India as reported in the Indian Newslink:

Indianz Dunedin Event Organiser Nayan Padiyar said Diwali afforded an opportunity to share Indian culture with the rest of the city and transfer cultural traditions to the next generation. “The Festival of Lights has become one of the Dunedin Indian community’s main annual cultural celebrations. Magician Jadugar and the folk dancers from Rajasthan will make a difference this year,” she said. (Staff Reporter, 2010)

At the seventh public celebration in 2011, Dunedin-based dancer Swaroopa Unni was a performer at the event, which was held at the Church of Christ in the town centre with about 100 people in attendance. As noted in the *Otago Daily Times*: “Event organiser Nayan Padiyar said the day of games, dancing and food aimed to bring young, old and new members of the Indian community together in Dunedin ‘and keep the culture alive, basically, for the children’. Their group would celebrate Diwali, Christmas and New Year’s Eve this year as an ‘extended family’, she said” (Staff Reporter, 2011).

After the 2011 Dunedin Diwali there was a gap until the public festival re-emerged in a slightly different guise, with new ground-up supporters and organisation. Diwali entered the public sphere in Dunedin again, this time through the intervention of a recent Indian migrant and professional dancer to the city, Swaroopa Unni, along with a collaboration with Dunedin Public Art Gallery (DPAG). As noted by a key participant, “somebody needs to take, take on that coordinator role”. Further, “I think it’s partly because of Swaroopa that there’s been more of the, this focus on Diwali”. Moving to New Zealand in 2010, Swaroopa’s involvement with Diwali came about soon after she started her Natyaloka School of Indian Dance in Dunedin in 2011. She notes that her involvement in Diwali in Dunedin was “by chance” because where she comes from in India the festival has never been a big part of her household or local community.

For her, “it was a huge surprise” to find Diwali as a pan-Indian identity celebration in New Zealand. She thought that Indian “New Zealanders have found Diwali to be that one thing that holds them together”. “It was not part of me at all and suddenly it’s part of me once I’ve come here but for me it’s more like organising, bringing people together”. “Some of the groups are performing for the first time after they’ve come to New Zealand ... it’s something they do here”.

In 2015 a public Diwali was instigated once again through a collaboration between a recent Indian migrant to the city and the Visitor Programmes Co-ordinator at DPAG. In the first two years, the event was held at DPAG and attracted about 1000 people. It included a number of Indian and non-Indian performances, but maintained an Indian-themed objective. To date, this type of public Diwali celebration has run each year (except 2020), and with each one growing in terms of participants and audience numbers. By 2017, there were two further Indian women helping out, along with participation from the Dunedin City Council’s community events coordinator and most recently with the help of the local Tamil Society. For this event, there were some cultural activities in DPAG and the performances were in the Upper Octagon. While oriented towards the local Indian community, which is reflected by the large contribution from local Indian performers, stall holders and attendees, the events do have a level of public engagement with the Dunedin community more broadly. In 2017, a large performance troupe came for other New Zealand Diwali celebrations, and the Dunedin event was able to link up with this visit. The visiting dance group from Maharashtra, Kalika Kala Kenra, took the main outdoor stage, and had flown to Dunedin with the help of ANZF, the Indian High Commission, and Air New Zealand (Staff Reporter, 2017). A large outdoor stage was set up in the Upper Octagon, which was a first for the celebration.

In terms of her intentions, Swaroopa noted in 2016 that: “In New Zealand, Diwali was more a celebration of Indian culture rather than any particular faith, she said. ‘It celebrates diversity in Dunedin,’ Mrs Unni said. The first public Dunedin celebration was last year and more people attended this year. The celebrations in Auckland and Wellington were ‘huge’ and she wanted more people to attend the free event in Dunedin. ‘We hope it gets bigger and bigger and becomes more of a community celebration’” (McAvinue, 2016).

Cultural diversity is illustrated with the participation of O-Taiko, a local *taiko* (drumming) group performing mainly Japanese-inspired drumming and performed by mainly non-Japanese participants. In 2017, for example, O-Taiko collaborated with Swaroopa and her Natyaloka School of Indian Dance with a Bharatanatyam/*taiko* combination creating a unique cultural performance (Figure 3).

Two years later, O-Taiko again was invited to open the event in the Octagon, preceding 90 minutes of South Asian music, ritual and dance. The inclusivity expressed in the marketing of Dunedin’s Diwali was summarised in the Facebook event notice for the celebration: “Everyone is welcome to this Diwali celebration!” (Dunedin Public Art Gallery, 2019). Such inclusivity was emphasised in the promotion of the event to the wider public, as the Dunedin City Council community events co-ordinator Marilyn Anderson noted in connection with the staged activities planned for the Upper Octagon: “We are aiming to encourage the wider Dunedin community to take part in and enjoy a wonderful cultural celebration” (Harwood, 2017).



Figure 3: O-Taiko performing with Natyaloka School of Indian Dance.
Photo by Louis Johnson, 2017.

By 2017, a further Diwali event was advertised in Dunedin, although this one, called Deepavali in the South Indian tradition, was hosted by DTS. The following year's DTS event, for example, was held at the Edgar Centre with about 150 members of the community and some non-Tamil speakers. The event offered a celebration that attracted local sponsorship and with "more than a dozen music and dance performances" (Mohammad, 2018). However, while holding their own Diwali celebration, DTS members also contributed to the public display in the Octagon.

The outdoor event in the Octagon was continued in 2018 and 2019 with what was becoming a typical mix of cultural performances, food and arts and crafts (Figure 4). In 2019, for example, one give-away postcard with a photo of dancers on one side and particulars about Diwali on the other noted:

Join us as the city comes alive with colours, lights and festivities to celebrate South Asian heritage in Dunedin. Learn how to wrap a turban, drape a sari, or dance Bollywood style... Have mehendi [henna paste] painted on your hands, taste traditional Indian food, create colourful rangoli patterns, and enjoy live performances... Learn more about the Indian communities in Dunedin.

The programme for the event was representative of the local Indian community with the examples of cultural diversity (Table 3):



Figure 4: Diwali in the Octagon, 2019. Photo by Henry Johnson, 2019.

Table 3. Performance schedule for Dunedin Diwali 2019.

Performer	Time (pm)
O-Taiko [Japanese-inspired drumming]	3:30–3:40
Natyaloka [Indian dance school]	3:42–3:47
ODA Bollywood [Otago Dance Association]	3:48–3:53
Beats of South [Chenda Melam drum group]	3:55–4:03
Kids Bollywood (Shital)	4:05–4:10
RASA Bollywood [dance school]	4:11–4:15
DTS kids singing [Dunedin Tamil Society]	4:17–4:22
Kids Bollywood	4:23–4:28
Khamzin Belly dance	4:30–4:36
DTS adults singing	4:38–4:44
Kids Bollywood	4:45–4:50
DTS kids dance	4:50–4:55

The local Indian community was represented by performances of classical and popular culture. The DTS presented classical dance (Bharatanatyam) and singing from south India's Carnatic. Natyaloka performed Bharatanatyam and Mohiniyattam under the direction of its leader, Swaroopa Unni, and Chenda Melam drum group presented percussion traditions from Kerala. ODA and RASA presented Bollywood dance combined with hip-hop fusion, under the direction of Bollywood dance choreographer Shaleen Nandan. The cultural content has remained similar over the past years, confirming the diverse local community's commitment to celebrating Diwali as a culturally inclusive and Indian community grass roots event.

Conclusion

The emergence of public Diwali festivals in Dunedin reveals a connection to the notion of festivalisation as well as intervention. Just as many other New Zealand Diwali celebrations have become major public spectacles, and often within a top-down funding/sponsorship structure that reflects governmental and commercial economic agenda internationally, so too has Diwali in Dunedin emerged as a significant event for a comparatively smaller city and with a smaller Indian population to Auckland. With Diwali in Dunedin, intervention has not been in the form of top-down local commercial or national funding and resource support, but has primarily been from the ground up with key individuals driving the event as a celebration of local Indian culture, cultural diversity and community. The Dunedin event extends ideas from other Diwali celebrations in New Zealand to the local setting, and utilises local resources to make the event happen.

In Dunedin, Diwali is a mirror of the national festivalisation process. Diwali in Dunedin does not receive the same level of support or recognition as some other events, but its emerging success can be attributed to alternative forms of festivalisation and intervention that may be interpreted as a community driven response to New Zealand's larger Diwali events in a centre/periphery relationship. Dunedin in its regional setting strives through individual intervention to emulate the festival as found in larger centres and offers a similar semblance of celebrating New Zealand's Indian culture within a multicultural framework, placing the celebration of identity and diversity at the core.

Within council event portfolios, community festivals play various roles in the event hierarchy. In Auckland, Diwali is produced in multiple forms, all receiving top-down support as major or community events. With a large population and long-term established relationships with Council, local businesses and Indian media, the events that do not fit into the major event portfolio, as in Auckland Diwali, still receive significant support well above what would be considered from a ground-up perspective. In the Dunedin case study, grass roots events are not considered major community events (determined by audience size), therefore they receive less support. As illustrated in Figure 5, the event's interaction with the community serves a different function (ground up) and may enjoy a sense of autonomy that major events (top down) do not. As the strategic relationships remain within the community, there is the ability to control content and engage local support. With major events, the placement of decision making remains within government hands. Depending on intervention, the outcomes will determine participants, cultural content, sponsors/funding/resources, and media promotion.

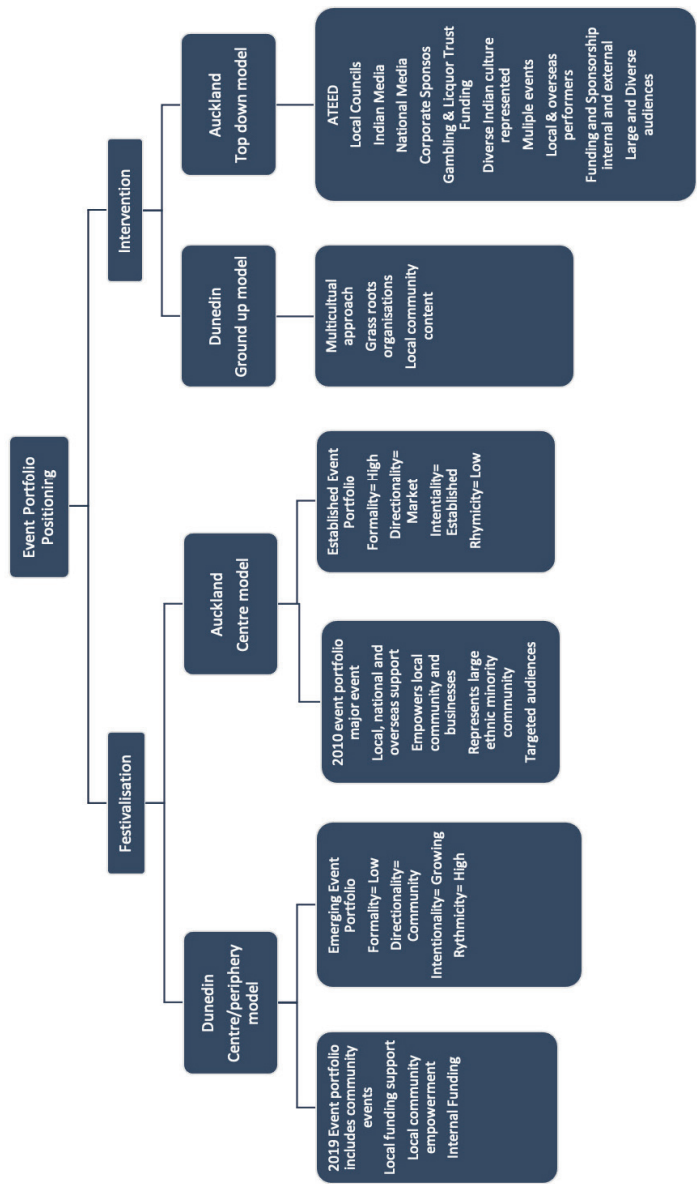


Figure 5: Auckland and Dunedin community event comparison from event portfolio perspectives, festivalisation and intervention.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study demonstrates contrasting interconnecting roles Diwali festivals play in the interventions and the festivalisation process in the cities of Dunedin and Auckland. Auckland represents an established event portfolio (Antchak & Pernecky, 2017), in contrast to Dunedin's emerging event portfolio as outlined in the recent *Dunedin Festival and Event Plan 2019–2023* (Dunedin City Council, 2019). The Dunedin plan indicates the growing intentionality of the formal role community events will play in the strategic planning of the city. The community focus of the event and its ability to change may be traded off by a higher level of government intervention and market initiatives as the portfolio matures. The top-down model, when applied, may make community empowerment more difficult as the fluidity is constrained by government policies. A limitation to our study and an area for further consideration would note cultural community responses to when the formalised festivalisation process intervenes and the low formality and community directionality give way to the top-down model. This intervention will change the cultural 'festivalscape', but will provide larger levels of funding, marketing and potential tourism income and impact small community players.

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