

Event and festival research: a review and research directions

Events and festivals are key elements of the tourism product in many destinations (Getz and Page, 2016). The ability of festivals and events to attract visitors to a host region, and to contribute to its economic and social well-being explains the significance afforded to them in many tourism policies and strategies (Mair and Whitford, 2013). This contribution is a strong justification for public funding of events and festivals (Felsenstein and Fleischer, 2003; O'Hagan, 1992). Thus, in conjunction with tourism, they are becoming a realistic policy option for regional development (Moscardo, 2007; Robinson *et al.*, 2004). However, the rapid growth of the events/festival industry in the past few decades has not always been matched with the level of research devoted to investigating it. Additionally, the fragmented nature of the research that exists poses challenges for researchers and practitioners trying to identify both the existing knowledge and any research gaps. Nonetheless, the interest of the academic community in event and festival research has increased significantly, particularly in the past decade. This has broadly aligned with the time that the *International Journal of Event and Festival Management* has been in existence. Here we look back on the general direction of research in our field and provide some potential avenues for future research to strengthen and enrich event and festival research.

To date, several reviews have examined the state of research relating to festivals and events. Getz (2010) reviewed the literature on festivals, identifying three major discourses – a classical discourse, concerning the roles, meanings and impacts of festivals in society and culture; an instrumentalist discourse, where festivals are viewed as tools to be used in economic development, particularly in relation to tourism and place marketing; and an event management discourse, which focuses on the production and marketing of festivals and the management of festival organisations (Getz, 2010). Getz and Page (2016) also reviewed the event tourism literature. According to Getz (2013), there are five core propositions of event tourism: events can attract visitors who may not otherwise visit the area; events can create a positive destination image and branding; events contribute to place marketing by making destinations more attractive; events animate cities, resorts and parks; and event tourism is a catalyst for other forms of development. A more recent review of trends in event management research was published in 2017, highlighting the themes which appeared to represent the most popular research topics over the period from 1998 until 2013 in studies published in leading hospitality and tourism as well as event-focused academic journals (Park and Park, 2017). A total of 698 articles were analysed and results showed that the most popular research topics were marketing, events and destinations and management. Planning and evaluation of events along with the use of technology in events were also well represented in this sample. However, events education and human resources in events appeared to be less well researched (Park and Park, 2017). Other reviews have been completed in the area of festivals, but they have been limited by a focus on papers published in journals associated with one discipline or field of study only. For example, Cudny (2014) took a geographical perspective and Frost (2015) reviewed anthropological studies of festivals, which broadly position festivals as sites of cultural practice and experience. However, neither addressed festival management issues.

The literature on events and festivals has been approached from a number of theoretical perspectives. Initially, cultural and social research predominated. However, more recently far more research has taken a business orientation, focusing on themes such as management, marketing and tourism, as noted by Park and Park (2017).



Festivals/events and tourism

The links between events (particularly festivals) and tourism have been a fertile area for research. Increasing tourism is one of the key reasons why local governments support and stage festivals (Mayfield and Crompton, 1995), and according to Anderssen and Getz (2009), many destinations view festivals as attractions and use them as part of their destination marketing strategy. There are clear benefits to hosting festivals, primarily in terms of economic but also social benefits. In relation to economic benefits, increasing visitor numbers, supporting job creation and underpinning economic development appear to be the main positive impacts of festivals; however, the extent of such positive impacts is disputed in relation to whether festivals actually attract visitors (McKercher *et al.*, 2006); whether visitors are even aware of festivals when they make their destination decision (Oh and Lee, 2012); and whether festival visitors, many of whom camp and eat on the festival site, are actually making much economic contribution at all (Saleh and Ryan, 2003). Further, in relation to social benefits such as community cohesion, sense of place, belonging and identity, the literature appears somewhat contrary. While there is plenty of evidence to suggest that these are the objectives of festival organisers, funding bodies and local authorities, there appears to be less evidence of whether festivals are successful in achieving these objectives, and through which mechanisms this may be facilitated. Further, while festivals have unique features and cultural dimensions which are also important factors for attracting tourists, the importance of exercising caution when using tangible or intangible historic and cultural resources for festival activities seems to be less acknowledged. Therefore, while the potential benefits of festivals have been clearly outlined, research appears to be lacking in terms of truly comprehending how best to achieve these desired benefits.

Festivals/events and marketing

There is also a significant body of work that examines events/festivals and marketing, with this topic representing the most widely researched theme identified by Park and Park (2017). Drawing on initial work by Crompton and McKay (1997), who proposed six key motivational dimensions to explain festival attendance, researchers have examined attendance motivations in a multitude of contexts, yet for the most part, few significant differences have been found. Existing reviews have already ascertained that attendance motivations have been thoroughly researched (Getz, 2010); yet, studies continue to be published in this topic. For example, while there have been some minor differences to the original Crompton and McKay (1997) motivation framework, the underlying dimensions appear to be relatively stable over time and across a variety of contexts. Nonetheless, each year more studies appear testing these dimensions in yet more contexts.

Similarly, an established body of research has concluded that good quality festivals result in attendee satisfaction, which then leads to increased loyalty in the form of future re-purchase intentions (see for example, Anil, 2012; Cole and Illum, 2006; Cole and Chancellor, 2009; Lee *et al.*, 2007; Son and Lee, 2011; Mason and Nassivera, 2013). Nevertheless, despite this literature, studies examining the relationship between satisfaction, quality and loyalty continue to be published. Finally, market segmentation studies occur frequently in the festival literature, yet as most are case study based, they are failing to make generalisable contributions to our knowledge of this area. In summary, it appears that in these areas, researchers have simply been making only small, incremental contributions.

Several issues have arisen in relation to festival marketing and consumer behaviour which would present useful opportunities for further study. For example, the decision-making process of festival goers requires more research, as much of this research to date has been undertaken in case study contexts, without further generalisation (e.g. Kruger and Saayman, 2012). Further, there is a noticeable lack of research in areas of marketing that more recently gained greater popularity, including experiential marketing, and very little research on the

role of social media and events. Experiential marketing focuses primarily on helping consumers to experience a brand, with the goal of forming a memorable connection and an expected outcome of future purchases and brand loyalty. Festivals offer an unrivalled opportunity for organisations to showcase their brands and build a connection in the mind of the consumer between the festival experience and the brand experience, as noted by Chen *et al.* (2011), yet this is a relatively unexplored area where future research should be carried out.

Social media has also been the focus of surprisingly few festival studies thus far. This is particularly unexpected given the widespread use of various types of social media and its obvious links with marketing. In a case study of music festivals, Hudson and Hudson (2013) carried out some pioneering work to understand how festival organisers are engaging with both social media and their consumers. Their findings suggest that music festival organisers are proactive in using social media. In a subsequent study, Hudson *et al.* (2015) developed a conceptual model that was subsequently tested with music festival attendees. Study findings provided evidence that social media do indeed have a significant influence on emotions and attachments to festival brands, and that social media-based relationships lead to desired outcomes such as positive word of mouth. Montanari *et al.* (2013) examine an Italian photography festival, and revealed how using social media and Web 2.0 technology enhanced the way the festival was able to communicate with its audience. Social media is also changing the way potential attendees make their attendance decision. Lee *et al.* (2012) investigated whether engagement with a festival “event” page on Facebook was linked with actual attendance at the festival. They found some evidence to suggest that the event Facebook page stimulated emotions and a desire to attend the actual festival. Research by Williams *et al.* (2015) suggests that festivals are both generators and animators of electronic word of mouth, but the authors acknowledge the exploratory nature of their research. Sigala (2018a, b) has advanced our conceptual knowledge of social media as it relates to both festival management and marketing, creating a typology of the way that social media is being used in festival management and organisation. She also drew attention to the use and influence of social media on both attendee experiences and decision making and festival marketing strategies. In view of the omnipresent nature of social media, this is an area where there is a considerable need for further research in the festival context; there is ample room for new studies relating to social media to bring theory development and practical implications.

Technology mediated experiences are changing the festivalscape as events and festivals integrate hardware, software, netware and humanware into the attendee experience (Neuhof *et al.*, 2014; Robertson *et al.*, 2015; Van Winkle *et al.*, 2018). ICT has been used at events and festivals for utilitarian and hedonic purposes yet little is known about the implications for the events, attendees, volunteers and other stakeholders. Thus, research into the integration of ICT into the administration, design, marketing, operations and risk management of events and festivals is essential. An upcoming special issue of *IJEFM* will focus on these key issues.

Festivals/events and management

Three key aspects of strategic festival management have received significant attention from researchers – stakeholder management; festival success factors and conversely, festival failures; and festivals and environmental sustainability. The importance of understanding and managing stakeholders is widely acknowledged (e.g. Reid, 2007), and it may very well be that further research will simply underline this. However, in relation to other aspects of management, there are certainly areas where more research is required. For example, whilst knowledge transfer appears to be taking place in successful festivals (Stadler *et al.*, 2014), transfer of knowledge is not well defined, or even explicitly acknowledged. Interestingly, festival failure has apparently been the subject of more research than festival success but further areas for useful contributions remain. These include succession planning and risk

management. In addition, differences in strategic management planning and operations between festivals under different types of ownership appear significantly under-researched (Andersson and Getz, 2009; Carlsen and Andersson 2011). Despite a few studies (e.g. Robertson and Yeoman, 2014; Yeoman, 2013), there have also been few attempts to foresee future trends and issues that are likely to affect festivals and their management.

Getz and Page (2016) also argue for further research to better understand the role that festivals play in bringing together disparate groups such as visitors and residents. Complex relationships between communal identity and place emerge as people have various sets of connections to multiple notions of “place” and “home”. This is an area where social science research could play an important role, bringing together the business aspects of tourism and festival management with the issues of place, space and people researched by geographers and social scientists.

There is also a small but growing body of knowledge on festivals and sustainability; however, this topical area offers considerable potential for future research, and ample room for further theoretical and practical contributions. Research attention may be placed on issues such as the triple bottom line, links between festivals and social sustainability, and even the opportunities for festivals to play an education and behaviour change role in relation to pro-environmental behaviour. For example, Andersson and Lundberg (2013) considered the notion of commensurability and proposed a framework for assessing the overall TBL sustainability of a festival by allocating a monetary value to each component. This is done using market values of emission rights, the shadow costs of environmental resources, contingent valuation analysis of (willingness to pay for) socio-cultural impacts and estimates of direct expenditure and opportunity cost. However, the authors acknowledge that there are aspects of their framework which are subjective, and they note that future research is needed to clarify the generalisability of their framework. Duran *et al.* (2014) also propose a framework – the Sustainable Festival Management Model – which highlights that stakeholder participation, especially non-governmental organisations, the tourism sector and local people who might be impacted by the festival, is vital for the development of a sustainable festival. Van Niekerk and Coetzee (2011) used the VICE model (visitor, industry community and environment) to assess the sustainability of an arts festival in South Africa and suggest that this framework can help to identify critical issues relating to a festival and its sustainability. However, they also note that research using this model is somewhat limited in the events context and that further research on the efficacy and usefulness of the model is required (Van Niekerk and Coetzee, 2011).

Implications for future festival/event research

There are several implications for future festival/event research resulting from the brief overview provided. These can be classified as opportunities for interdisciplinary research, a reliance on the western perspective and a corresponding lack of different cultural perspectives, an absence of research into the pedagogy of festival/event studies and finally, an array of limitations associated with the current body of knowledge.

First, there is a lack of interdisciplinary work that incorporates business and social and/or spatial perspectives. In his review, Getz (2010) highlighted that the classical discourse was under-acknowledged in extant festival studies, and that more connections should be made between festival studies and other disciplines such as sociology and anthropology. Further, Cudny (2014) called for more theoretical research to underpin the development of festival studies in future. Much of the work that has taken a business perspective, perhaps not surprisingly, has focused inwards on the festival – how to market, manage, stage it and provide a good quality service and experience (see Park and Park, 2017). However, very little of the festival research appearing in the business literature has been outwardly focused – considering how festivals may be mechanisms for

achieving other aims – social, cultural, political, behavioural, etc. Clearly, in order to survive, festivals have to be successful business products, but in order to achieve other objectives, managers need to be aware of some of the issues that are explored in the social sciences and humanities literature, such as inclusion vs exclusion at festivals, festivals and authenticity/tradition, and festivals as spaces of protest, counterculture and self-expression, to name but a few. Interdisciplinary work, using theories and concepts from beyond business disciplines (e.g. social capital, affect and emotion theories and Florida's (2002, 2003) creative industries framework) would inform festival research, and while the majority of recent work being published on festivals has appeared in journals associated with tourism, events and business more broadly, applying other disciplinary theories and frameworks would bring these to a new audience and thus, help to make a greater contribution.

Second, there is a dearth of different cultural perspectives in festival and event research. While already highlighted by Getz (2010), it appears that researchers have not paid much heed to his call for comparative and cross-cultural studies. There is a need to move away from Western paradigms when examining non-Western phenomena. For example, Pine (2002) suggested that the development policy of hotel groups or chains established in China needs to consider the Chinese socio-economic context, thus implying that a research model should be developed specifically for China hotel development. China's hotel industry is different from that of other countries due to fierce competition, multifirm ownership and management systems, and coupled with China's unique culture society might require a different research approach. Similar considerations would be of value in relation to festivals research in other non-western contexts. In a similar vein, the number of countries with resident populations that are culturally diverse has led to an awareness of the importance of building well-organised, multicultural societies (Chin, 1992; Lee *et al.*, 2012; Parekh, 2006). Festivals can play a significant role in this. Multicultural festivals are especially important for minority groups seeking to maintain cultural traditions (Lee *et al.*, 2012). However, despite some initial research in this area, further detailed study of the nature of festivals in a multicultural society would be of tremendous value.

Third, there are no pedagogical articles specifically related to festival studies. There is a relatively limited body of knowledge relating to teaching event management. For example Getz (2010) highlights that events students should learn and be able to apply both event specific knowledge (such as understanding the meaning, importance and impacts of festivals and events, and in addition their limited duration and episodic nature) as well as management specific knowledge including marketing, finance and accounting. Additionally, initiatives such as the development of the International Event Management Body of Knowledge seek to define research and understand the parameters of events and the knowledge, understanding and skills required in order to succeed in a contemporary environment (Silvers *et al.*, 2005). Nonetheless, the pedagogy of festival and event studies remains an important, yet significantly under-researched area.

Finally, there are a number of limitations relating to the existing body of festival/event literature. Reminiscent of other review papers in the broader tourism and hospitality context, and beyond (e.g. Denizci Guillet and Mohammed, 2015; Kong and Cheung, 2009; Mattila, 2004; Yoo and Weber, 2005), the vast majority of papers relating to festival/event research are empirical rather than conceptual and theoretical in nature. In addition, as has been noted already, much of the research in the field of festivals has taken a case study approach. This has arguably limited the scope and scale of our knowledge of festivals. More sophisticated methods, both qualitative and quantitative, would provide a more nuanced study of particular festivals and places, yet at the same time contribute further to advancing our theoretical and practical knowledge of festivals.

Given this, a call for greater theory development and testing within the festival context appears timely. This is in line with Oh *et al.* (2004, p. 441) who note that “[...] applications are not a wrong effort to make; what is needed is a stronger conceptual rigour and meaningful contribution [to] back to the mainstream theoretical thought through creative application and domain-specific theory development activities.”

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