New perspectives on festival and events research

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper introduces the eight articles on festival and events research in this special issue of IJCTHR.

Findings – This paper categorizes eight articles into empirical studies and conceptual pieces and summarizes their contributions to literature. The eight papers explore festivals and events from the following perspectives: participants' values, motivations, and spending; organizers' risk managements; sociological examination; sustainability practices; and practical advices.

Research limitations/implications – The paper provides recommendations for future research in festivals and events.

Originality/value – The value of this paper lies in its review of current approaches to researching festivals and events, and advice provided for future research on the topic.

Keywords Festivals and Events, Empirical, Conceptual, Review, Future Research

Paper type General Review
Introduction

Festivals and events play an important role in the tourism and hospitality industry for two major reasons. First, they create memories and stories, highlight mundane everyday experience, elevate people's spirit, and celebrate human existence. The 25th of December is only a 24 hours' segment of the flow of time in people's lives and virtually undistinguishable from the 24th or 26th of December; our own birthdays every year have no physical development markers on our body and mind. By bestowing the two dates’ special meanings, we create milestones in our existence and allow ourselves to have a chance to ponder our existence and the meanings of our lives. Thus, festival and events are special types of social activities which give our lives deeper meanings and separate us from animals. People seek meaning in their lives; thus they are willing to travel to faraway places to be part of a festival or event. Second, festivals and events contribute to the economic income for the local people in a city, region, or country. Visitors to a festival or event stay in paid accommodations, dine out in restaurants, participate in group activities, and purchase souvenirs - another way of creating long lasting memories and meanings. The inflow of money will create jobs and stimulate the local economy. Festivals and events offer spiritual, sociological, and economical contributions to the tourism and hospitality industry.

Studies on festivals and events are mostly case-based and descriptive in nature, and they usually pose great challenges for researchers. First, festivals and events are diverse in themes, scales, and participants: they could be historical, seasonal, spiritual, or political; the numbers of participants could range from a few people to millions; they could be local events in a city such as a local food festival or international events such as the Olympic Games. Thus, participants’ demographic composition, motivation, and the structure and goals of the events are all different. Second, festivals and events are highly dynamic with continuous flows of participants. The
participants are excited, rowdy, and sometimes intoxicated. As a result, on-site surveys and interviews are difficult to carry out; the fleeting and faulty memories will make after-event surveys unreliable. As a result, the results of many studies are neither comparable nor repeatable.

Nonetheless, recent burgeoning of studies in this area and specific journals created for this field (such as *International Journal of Event and Festival Management*) reflect the value and significance of this area of research. This special issue on Festival Tourism is specifically aimed toward the advancement of the study in festivals and tourism. Eight articles in this special issue encompass both empirical studies as well as conceptual and commentary pieces. The festivals and events discussed in these articles include a local food and wine festival, a sporting event, a music festival, a National Day celebration, and a meta-analysis of several events. The topics covered include participants' motivations, perceptions, and spending; economic impacts; sustainable practices; practical advices; and sociological reflections.

Among all the articles, five are empirical research. Sohn and Yuan's research studied a local food and wine festival in Texas. By surveying the festival attendees with values and lifestyles questions, they analyzed the types of people and discovered a five-factor solution based on value and lifestyles: idealist, achiever, explorer, belonger, and innovator. The second article by Taks, Green, Chalip, Kesenne, and Martyn examined spending patterns of different groups of non-local participants of an international sport event through self-reporting. Their studies showed that participants account for less than one-third of the spending and coaches are the biggest spenders. Hospitality and transportation are the biggest beneficiaries of the event. Their results are very informative to those local tourism professionals who are calculating the economic impact of their events. Daniels, Park, Harmon, and Brayley examined the risk management aspect of the National Mall and Memorial Park. The article includes two studies: one is an
analysis of open-ended comments to park managers, and the second one is an observation and
analysis of the 2007 National Independence Day Celebration. The results indicate that personal
safety is viewed as most vital by visitors, though visitors are not wary of terrorist attacks. The
visitors also expressed strong displeasure with barricades and other security measures. The
second study revealed security concerns during a large-scale event. Combined, the results
suggest a disconnection between risk perception and risk management.

The fourth study by Yolal, Woo, Cetinel, and Uysal analyze different motivational factors
of attendees' of different events at an art festival. Their study revealed different motivations
among attendees of different festival products. Those attendees, however, did not differ in the
perception of socio-economic impacts of the festival.

The final paper, an empirical piece by Litvin, Pan, and Smith, uses a case study to
specifically reveal an often-ignored economic benefit of a festival. Usually the calculation of
economic impact of a festival focuses on the spending of its directly related participants,
attendees, and personnel. This study showed that the increased accommodation prices due to
increased demand could contribute significantly to the local economy and should be figured in
the impact calculation.

The three conceptual pieces include a conceptual model of sustainable practices for
events, a sociological investigation of events in modern times, and practical advices on
establishing and promoting festivals and events in order to achieve better economic impact.
Bernick and Boo critically examined the festival tourism industry in the context of entertainment
age and demonstrated the socio-philosophical impact of entertainment age on the tourism
industry. Specifically they explained the rise of festivals in the modern time from a sociological
perspective. Yuan's article took a meta-synthesis approach, reviewed past studies on sustainability in events and festivals, and proposed three interconnected components: the event organizer, the place, and the event-goers. She further offered three managerial principles in managing a successful sustainable event or festival. The last conceptual piece by Dr. Litvin used Charleston, South Carolina in the United States as an example to motivate industrial leaders to upgrade local events into tourist attractors. He specifically addressed the funding opportunities and challenges using real examples.

In conclusion, eight articles in this special issue addressed various aspects of events and festivals from marketing, economic, and sociological perspectives. Combined, they demonstrate the multi-dimensionality of this tourism phenomenon and offer more in-depth understanding of attendees, management, and economic impacts. However, studies on festivals and events are practical in nature and need to solve real-world problems. Researchers need to pay more attention to certain practical aspects of festivals and events, such as creative design of events, online marketing, and local residents' perceptions of events and festivals. More qualitative studies are needed to address the experience of festival attendees and participants.

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