

EVENT DESIGN IN OUTDOOR MUSIC FESTIVAL AUDIENCE BEHAVIOR (A CRITICAL TRANSFORMATIVE RESEARCH NOTE)

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This work, a conceptual forward-looking article, examines the management of audiences at music festivals now and indicates a critical maneuver of focus for the future. The theoretical objectives and conclusions of a body of work by Robertson—discussing and then proposing future models of festival leadership to support place and event sustainability—are applied to bodies of work by Hutton and colleagues, ranging from 2011 to 2017, and Brown and colleagues in 2012, 2013, and 2016. It is argued that a more holistic construct of civic responsibility will emerge in what will necessarily be a postcocreative, coproductive future for many critical mass meeting experiences. Hutton and Brown provide vital insight as to how consideration of the social psychological domain of the outdoor music festival (OMF) audience is critical to a design of the experience that is both experientially satisfying/fulfilling and, importantly, safe. This work uses literature related to festival management and critical transformation to propose a theoretical position arising from a construct of: transformative civic responsibility; social trust (as a component of social capital); and positive psychology. The work considers the dynamics and importance of outdoor music festivals in turbulent socioeconomic times, and the potential limitations of a behaviorist approach to future music festival crowd management. A case study research project was undertaken at a series of OMFs staged in South Australia and the results are used as examples of new forms of dynamic research for critical and turbulent times.

Key words: Critical; Music festival; Crowd; Audience behavior; Cotransformative; Positive psychology; Transformative civic responsibility

Introduction: The Constraints of Event Crowd Management

Ensor, Robertson, and Ali-Knight (2007, 2011) and Robertson and Rogers (2009) observed from in-depth interview data with event directors in the UK that there is much evidence that organizational priorities and creative capacity is often limited by external pressures (e.g., media, finance or funding, and policy or politics). In their review of factors influencing the experience of crowds at events in the UK, Filingeri, Eason, Waterson, and Haslam (2018) interviewed a range of event organizers responsible for crowd management ($N = 41$) in the UK. The results indicated that the priorities of finance, security, health, and safety determined a crowd management process that was about reducing liability (Abbott & Geddie, 2000; Reid & Ritchie, 2011), “rather than enhancing satisfaction” (Filingeri et al., 2018, p. 18).

The behaviorist systems and process-based response to crowd behaviors, which is applied at most music festivals, does not attempt to promote a positive entertainment or social experience for the audience although this may be an unintended consequence. Instead, it is a response to potential negative outcomes. Accordingly, knowledge of audience dynamics that relate to artists (the performers), their setlists of songs and other entertainments (the program), and the social setting (a component of the event environment) of an OMF has remained of limited interest to those that manage safety at music festivals (Brown & Hutton, 2013; Duncan, 2009; Hutton, Zeitz, Brown, & Arbon, 2011). The authors propose that, while an emergency management response approach may well provide a feeling of security for the event managers (Hutton, 2018), in the near future such an approach by festival leadership will need to change. As models of leadership respond to the limitations of cocreation, a more holistic construct of civic responsibility will emerge in what will necessarily be a post cocreative, coproductive future for many critical mass gathering experiences.

Leadership and Civic Responsibility

The connection between civic responsibility and festivals and other public events is not new. Its

purpose and relationship with the wider public institutions of governance has been recorded at least since Roman times (Mitchell, 1990). Similarly, the sense in which festivals bring civic engagement in the form of sense of community or communities has been widely recognised (Getz & Page, 2016; Nordvall, Pettersson, Svensson, & Brown, 2014).

“Membership,” “influence,” “integration,” and “shared emotional connections” are terms used in the psychology and society literature relating to community festivals (Albanesi, Cicognani, & Zani, 2007, pp. 387–388). Much of this stems from the seminal work by McMillan and Chavis (1986) and is commonly evidenced in sense of community indices (Chipuer & Pretty, 1999; Pretty, Andrews, & Collet, 1994; Prezza, Amici, Roberti, & Tedeschi, 2001) and later in festival-specific literature and research (see, for example, Derret, 2003, 2009; Reid, 2007).

The need for responsible leadership behavior in response to changing performance needs and increasing calls for the consideration of sustainable development can be identified as focus areas for leadership (Metcalf & Benn, 2013; Pless, Maak, & Waldman, 2012; Stahl & De Luque, 2014). Although this has been observed in the management literature, it has been given little attention in contemporary festival literature (Einarsen & Mykletun, 2009; Pernecky, 2015; Robertson, 2016). However, leadership in times of turbulence may force new values (Lane & Down, 2010; Maddock, 2012) for festivals and events. Public events are already seen as barometers of society and social engagement, albeit both supportive and potentially contrary to neo-liberalist agendas (Flew & Cunningham, 2010; Foley & McPherson, 2007; Steinbrink, Haferburg, & Ley, 2011). It is opined here that new values will likely soon emerge from our turbulent times that will affect new foci and styles of leadership.

Turbulent Times and Transformation

Critically, the authors posit a transformative research position. Rather than suggest that the field of event studies should respond to the transformative paradigm (Mertens, 2007; Shannon-Baker, 2016), the authors argue that the management of crowds at OMFs can offer a base for other research design in the contemporary transformative world.

As such, research may sometimes need to step beyond the cocreation paradigm (Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2014), forward to a future in which social civic responsibility can be seen as part of a critical need in society. This may be described as a part of a post cocreative society, that is, where critical factors determine new forms of coproduction that are acceptable to all those involved and directly affected by it.

Further, it is proposed that democratic objectives in a decade described as turbulent times (Devine & Devine, 2012; Getz, Andersson, & Larson, 2006; Larson, Getz, & Pastras, 2015; Van Niekerk & Pizam, 2015) are often more suited to a position of cotransformation in which leadership must reestablish trust with others to validate responses to critical issues as quickly and as systematically as possible. Accordingly, while the movement to a cocreative paradigm is both irreversible and an important one for society today (Sanders & Stappers, 2008; Venkat, 2009), and while there is a changing focus on value creation (Van Winkle & Bueddefeld, 2016), so too there are limitations to its application.

There is a growing body of research indicating that cocreation systems often bypass innovation, purposefully or inadvertently justifying slow movements of change. For example, this occurs in the adaption of services to become more environmentally sustainable utilizing cocreative process. Hence, increments of cocreative change may be small—such as minor labeling systems or through a process of greenwashing (Cho, 2015; Mair & Laing, 2012), rather than the implementation of true innovation for meaningful and effective long-term positive change. Therefore, cocreation is not politically or culturally benign or unquestionably egalitarian. Individual and networked power can influence process both negatively and positively (Madsen & O'Mullan, 2018).

Further, at points where cocreation is seen to fail, the emotions felt by cocreators can be extremely negative (Sugathan, Ranjan, & Mulky, 2017), and have been recorded bringing out self-directed emotions rather than collective ones. Accordingly, cocreation may not be best suited to critical stages of social or environmental activity or change and, indeed, may serve to make it more dangerous or more critical. Critical, in the context

of this work, refers both to the process of judicious thinking and evaluation and to the notion of being at a juncture of crucial change. For OMFs, as examples of mass social engagement, there are large numbers of people in close proximity and many such junctures as a consequence.

Social Capital and Positive Social Transformation in Turbulent Times

There is large body of work exploring the way in which organized events and festivals contribute to the social capital indices of places and aid the bonding and bridging process towards this (Arcodia & Whitford, 2006; Crespi-Vallbona & Richards, 2007; Quinn, 2003; Quinn & Wilks, 2017; Robertson & Lees, 2014). Similarly, there is a significant body of literature that investigates the contributions that organized events and festivals make to economic and social well-being and social interaction (Nordvall et al., 2014; Saijun, Anderson, & Min, 2011). Implicit in all considerations of social capital with respect to festivals is that festivals can also serve to transform the lives of the attending individuals.

Chalcraft and Magaudda (2013) referred to how festivals offer opportunities for a multitude of cultures, aesthetics, politics, and values to come together and for these festival-related interactions to impact positively outside of the festival as transformation. St. John (2015) queried the longevity and capacity of electronic dance music festivals in particular to provide platforms for the transformative liminality that is referred to in related research (e.g., Robertson, Yeoman, Smith, & McMahan-Beattie, 2015). St. John considered whether such, often very expensive, augmented experiences might not instead be part of a transitional experience for the attendee. Nevertheless, a study of first-time and returning electronic dance festival attendees at the Daisy Carnival in Las Vegas suggests that there are positive and lasting changes derived from the festival experience (Little, Burger, & Croucher, 2018).

There is a growing body of research that identifies the correlation of music festivities with societal well-being (Ballantyne, Ballantyne, & Packer, 2014; Packer & Ballantyne, 2011; Robertson et al., 2015) and in this research, we consider the critical nature and role of OMFs and their capacity

to contribute to the transformation of the lives of individuals and communities in what are recognized as turbulent times (Hall & Rowland, 2016). These turbulent economic and social pressures include: the empirical and observed evidence of global warming; countries torn by war with geopolitical boundaries still being argued; the economic frailty and divisions between the so-called “haves” and “have nots”; an increasing growth of social protest and awareness of injustice; and communication technology that is seen as transformative yet socially oppressive. What, then, is the contributory transformative potential of festivals (Jarman, *In print*), and more specifically, the purposive potential of outdoor music festivals to contribute to transformative futures (Robertson et al., 2015; Robertson, 2016)?

In times of social and economic turbulence, festivals are likely to be both an extremely important contribution to positive living (Filep, Volic, & Lee, 2015; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) and a successful outlet for the minimization of individual discontent. Filip et al. (2015) referred to Seligman’s (2011) configuration of PERMA, that is, positive emotions, positive engagement, positive relationships, positive meaning (i.e., a sense of life purpose), and positive achievement. These elements are referred to as attributes for measurement of well-being (Kern, Waters, Adler, & White, 2015).

In considering purposive professional practice toward sustainability and well-being, we consider this as coproductive knowledge process (Rossi, Rosli, & Yip, 2017) for the future. In so doing, it is proposed that festivals and other cultural and community activity can aid the capacity of citizens to adapt, that is, contribute to positive social development and become more resilient (Berkes & Ross, 2013) both within and outside of the community of the event.

Concomitantly, the work proposes that a coproduced resolution of attendees and event leaders should be considered as a core element of the design of OMFs. Vital to this consideration is the psychology of music festival attendees (Brown & Hutton, 2013; Hutton et al., 2011) and confirmation of the significance of the role of the event program—and opportunities for real-time management that minimizes the level of patient presentation. It is to this consideration the work now turns.

Social Trust, Positive Psychology, and Crowd Behavior

Brown and Hutton (2013) determined that event design is “predicated on an understanding of the psychosocial domain of the audience” (p. 43). It is through better understanding of the physiological and psychological determinants of audience experience that one can better ensure the successful management of crowds and their behavior. If, as this article proposes, the festival provider has critical civic responsibility to ensure and improve well-being through transformative service (Ostrom, Parasuraman, Bowen, Patrício, & Voss, 2015) and ensure positive reaction to risk or adverse conditions, then OMF leadership must provide a new heightened capacity for psychosocial design. In essence, an understanding of the psychosocial domain must contribute to the civic responsibility of making lives better. Crowd management as applied to most mass events is, as Filingeri et al. (2018) observed, based on behaviorist models that don’t allow for more complex involvement in experience or efforts to build social trust.

Social trust is what people rely on when they have to make decisions about what is risky or beneficial (Siegrist & Cvetkovish, 2000) and is recognized as a vital component of social capital (Putnam, 2001), civil society (Kasse, Newton, & Scarbrough, 1997; Newton, 2001), and the belief or trust of one group (e.g., young people) relative to another (e.g., older people). However, the comparability of social trust analysis is debated considerably (Freitag & Bauer, 2013). There is empirical evidence to indicate the validity and comparability of measures of social trust through survey data capture, even when involving different cultures (Davidov, Meuleman, Cieciuch, Schmidt, & Billiet, 2014; Freitag & Bauer, 2013).

Within the relatively short temporal period of an OMF we propose social trust is a significant coproductive tool with which to aid the safety of the festival experience. Further, the capacity to form social trust within the context of OMFs has a great social function that is not often accredited to it.

Music Festivals as Barometers of Society Wellness

OMFs are a unique form of gathering that have distinctive elements leading to higher levels of

patient presentation (injury and trauma) of those attending than many similar scale mass gatherings (Earl & Raineri, 2005; Hutton, Ransie, Verdonk, Ullah, & Arbon, 2014). Some of the factors involved include: event site environmental issues (for example, temperature, humidity, and crowd density leading to heat exhaustion and heat stroke) (Milstein, Seaman, Liu, Bissel, & Maguire, 2003); alcohol-related incidents (drunkenness and related violent behaviors, alcohol poisoning); substance related incidents (e.g., recreational and other drug use) (Hutton & Brown, 2015); physical injuries resulting from the relatively common occurrences of “moshing” and crowd “surfing”; and the throwing of missiles (e.g., cans and bottles) all lead to a highly volatile platform from which audience behavior can be launched. Additionally, attendees may also present with mental health-related symptoms (Hutton et al., 2014), data that had not previously been collected.

At a time when society can be described as fragile and challenged (Allen, 2017), where festival failure can occur in many ways and there can be long-lasting negative consequences for festival operations (Carlsen, Andersson, Ali-Knight, Jaeger, & Taylor, 2010; Getz, 2002), there is also limited reporting of the health impacts of OMFs (Ransie et al., 2017). Much is written about the music festival experience and state of liminality, as experience and as cultural and social influence (Boyce-Tillman, 2009; Howard-Grenville, Golden-Biddle, Irwin, & Mao, 2011; Robertson et al., 2015; Turner, 1977), but less about the physical dangers that may result because of this state of otherness (Turner, 1977). Extreme examples of festival tragedies such as those at Denmark’s Roskilde Festival in 2000 and the Love Parade in Germany in 2009 and the effect of shootings and terrorism (e.g., the Las Vegas Music Festival Shooting in 2018; the bombing at Ariana Grande’s Manchester concert in 2017) have been reported, but there are many more that attract media rather than research attention (Ritchie, Shipway, & Chien, 2010; Robertson & Rogers, 2009); the 722 fatalities between 1999 and 2014 at electronic music festivals reported by Turris and Lund (2016) being one of few exceptions.

Therefore, it is profoundly important for event health and safety that event risks, threats,

emergencies, and disasters are contained once they occur and, more importantly, proactively minimized through preemptive action. Legislation, equipment, organizations, advisers, and protocols based on exacting training and knowledge should be referred to but, as the extended research by Hutton et al. (2011), Hutton, Brown, and Verdonk (2013), and Hutton and Brown (2015, 2017) has shown, the program is the most significant direct influencer on OMF audience behavior and subsequent patient presentations. The music style or genre of music (e.g., death metal or world music) has been shown to influence audience behavior as does the artists active encouragement of particular activities (Hutton & Brown, 2017). These can range from benign jumping up and down, dancing, and clapping hands, or the more dangerous crowd surfing and the aptly named “wall of death” where the crowd parts for some distance and then runs full tilt slamming into each other.

From their ethnographic research at two separate summer OMFs staged in Adelaide, Australia, over a number of days within 1 week of each other, Hutton and Brown (2017) collected multiple data sets in a range of formats. These included: audience observation; static and video photography; event site environmental data (physical review); number of patient presentations; and the programmed activity at the festival all recorded and consistently time lined for later cross-tabulation (Hutton & Brown, 2017). In reflecting on this data, and relating it to previous OMF analysis (Brown & Hutton, 2013; Hutton et al., 2013; Hutton et al., 2011), it is clear that festival leaders, event designers, and management need to consider the effect of the program more carefully in planning safety for the event and, more importantly, need to do so proactively during the event staging. Hutton and Brown (2015) described this new management process as real time positive intervention (RTPI), modifying the event design itself and adapting the settings and program in response to observable audience behaviors (Brown & Hutton, 2013; Hutton & Brown, 2015).

It is proposed here that RTPI in OMFs may provide support for positive social gatherings and the formation of trust in society at a time when social mistrust may have particularly negative outcomes (Nunkoo, 2015). OMFs are one example

of the importance of new forms of action to both support and apply positive psychology through action.

Discussion

We are now at a critical juncture where civic responsibility needs to be engaged. Festivals are an integral part of our social fabric and festivals' inclusion in society is now a social requirement (Robertson, 2016). There is a critical civic responsibility for the festival provider (leader or leaders) to ensure and improve well-being through transformative service (Anderson & Ostrom, 2015; Ostrom et al., 2015).

Anderson et al. (2015) considered the importance of transformative service research, arguing that it creates improvements for the lives of individuals. As Pritchard, Morgan, and Ateljevic (2011) and Molina-Avorin and Font (2016) have commented, tourism, events, and festivals can and should aid the transformative life improvements for consumers and communities (Robertson, 2016; Robertson & Lees, 2014). Coproduction (Powell & Dalton, 2003; Rossi et al., 2017) offers a base from which cocreation can be developed but need not necessarily be omnipresent. Transformative research offers a platform for the applied area of risk management theory (event safety in the context of this article) as well as value creation at an OMF and crowd control. Further, they have been forwarded as critical constituents of transformative futures.

As Filep et al. (2015) opined, the lenses of *positive psychology* can be better used to both understand the three key phases of the event experience: anticipatory, on site, and post hoc. Thus, positive psychology can plan and design successful events. Reference in this theoretical work has been made to the on-site phase in particular. Hutton and Brown (2017) provided further evidence of the importance of the program, concluding that an understanding of audience behavior and how that can be employed in the design of the OMF experience is underutilized in management of behaviors at these events (Brown & Hutton, 2013; Hutton et al., 2011). Further, it can be suggested that the existing models that are used to address a great deal of the issues related to crowd management are overly dependent on a behaviorist paradigm.

Conclusion

Acknowledgement of the critical juncture of society and the need to purposively consider positive psychology and stimulus for social well-being will give outdoor music festivals increased responsibility. Enhanced consideration of the design of the experience will necessitate new transformative civic responsibilities and leadership skills. Consideration of future research needs are required.

Despite the frequency of their application, it is concluded here that neither the more recent cocreative paradigm discussed in festival and event literature nor the behaviorist paradigm are appropriate to the future research needs of crowd management at OMFs. Emergency planning and risk minimization of music festivals through systematic process will remain very important. Certification and professional support towards that end is vital. Risk minimization strategies of all forms at OMFs are vital (and significant advances are being made in that area). The authors are also aware of the negative potential of trying to manage mass public events via psychology. However, application of positive psychology and new notions of leadership that affirms social trust requires new modes of RTPI both to ensure a better and safer experience, and also to coproduce the social action (e.g., OMF) itself. This, it is concluded, can be a part of a cotransformative process in which increased trust can advance society.

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