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Introduction: events in society

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INTRODUCTION: EVENTS IN SOCIETY

The origins of this special issue of *Event Management* developed from research originally presented at the Advancing Event Research Seminar Series held in Australia during June and July 2014.

The selection of articles in the issue reflects the interlinked but distinct themes of the Series symposia hosted by Curtin University in Perth (June 11–12) and Victoria University in Melbourne (July 3). The themes in question were *Events, Festivals and Communities* and *Events in Society*, respectively.

Events, Festivals and Communities was a response to the limited research attention afforded to smaller scale, local, and regional events and their role in developing tourism destinations. Growing organically within the community and impacting on it in a number of ways, existing studies have documented the dangers of commodifying community events for tourist consumption (Chien, Ritchie, Shipway, & Henderson, 2012; Derrett, 2003; Rogers & Anastasiadou, 2011); however, other more contemporary approaches see the development of entirely new events to entice tourists to regional destinations. From a call for abstracts on Trinet and associated listservs, 11 abstracts were selected for presentation on a range of topics including, but not limited to, succession planning for community festivals, markets and audiences for art fairs, and social networks in the festival space. Industry and government were also represented with three event case studies and a presentation from the Western Australian Government's event development agency, Eventcorp.

The two keynote speakers at the *Events, Festival and Communities* symposium were Associate Professor Jane Ali-Knight (Edinburgh Napier University) and Professor Greg Richards (Tilburg University). Associate professor Ali-Knight spoke about both Edinburgh and Abu Dhabi's events

strategies, particularly in relation to branding the destination and also the different perspectives of local and other audiences. Professor Richards presented on the role of events as social phenomena and how events and festivals are both created by communities and also create their own communities in turn.

Taking the title of this special issue, *Events in Society*, was the second of the symposia in the series, which aimed to lend interdisciplinary insights to the study of events in society, drawing on a range of disciplinary perspectives and seeking inputs from academics traditionally publishing outside the field of Event Studies. Acknowledging Getz's (2012) mapping of the potential disciplinary contributions of anthropology and sociology relative to the field, it was anticipated that the symposium could confirm and also identify new topics stimulated by the multidiscipline-based perspective in order to generate new knowledge in the emergent field. Relative to this theme, six abstracts were presented at the symposium on a diverse range of topics, accompanied by keynotes from Professors Chris Gibson (University of Wollongong) and John Connell (University of Sydney) as cultural geographers presenting on Australia's largest investigation of the contributions of over 400 festivals to the social and economic life of rural and regional communities, and Professor Tom Baum (University of Strathclyde) offering an outsider, and at times, critical perspective on the disciplinary boundaries and theoretical advancements in the Event Studies field.

The final selection of articles for the special issue reflects the varied range of topics and disciplinary perspectives presented at the symposia. For example, the Davies and Gibson and Connell articles

both bring the authors grounding in the geography discipline to the study of community-run festivals. Interestingly, both articles were drawn from calls to different symposia, highlighting the interwoven nature of their themes. They examine rural events and festivals and the role these play in the lives of Australian rural communities. Davies picks up the theme of succession planning by examining the legacy of developed local leadership capacity stemming from the short-lived festival, SnowFest, held in a small rural town in New South Wales, while Gibson and Connell investigate the significance of festivals for rural communities suffering the disastrous impacts of the long lasting Millennium Drought. Davies also highlights in her contribution the important role of volunteers as leaders and followers in underpinning the success of community festivals, a supposition that is supported by Lockstone-Binney et al. in their study of volunteers drawn from four events of differing scale and type, including community events, clustered into three homogenous volunteer segments using an established event volunteering motivational scale.

Separate articles from Johnson et al. and Filep et al. as disciplinary contributions explore the positive influences of events, respectively, as a form of play and from the positive psychology perspective. Johnson et al. draw on fieldwork conducted at the hallmark Parkes Elvis Festival in Australia, which annually attracts hordes of Elvis devotees to the town to engage in the playful commemoration of all things Elvis. The authors use leisure theory to reflect upon how they were drawn into the “playframe,” highlighting its potential to set clear rules and parameters for participant behavior in the event space. Filep et al. review the nascent research field of positive psychology and outline a research agenda based on this theoretical lens for exploring the contributions of events and the experiences of event audiences, with a view to contributing to Getz’s (2012) initial mapping of the discipline-based discourse of Event Studies.

Considering events from a less positive perspective, Frew and White’s contribution uses a descriptive case study approach to reflect upon the broader implications for national identity of three events commemorating tragedies and disasters in Australia’s recent and past history. The discussion, in part, is framed by the concept of first-, second-,

and third-generation memory (Hirsch, 2012), with related implications for determining when best to stage these solemn and emotional remembrances in the wake of awful tragedies.

The contributions of Tiew et al. and Mair are linked by a focus on management perspectives. Tiew et al. apply Mitchell, Agle, and Wood’s (1997) theory of stakeholder salience to a music festival in Malaysian Borneo to identify several different forms of stakeholder power. Responding to the limited extent of related research in developing and non-Western countries, Tiew et al. puts forward a typology of stakeholders’ powers as a contribution to stakeholder research. Identifying another area in which research is still to be developed, Mair uses motivation theory developed in the parent management discipline and tourism field to propose a conceptual frame to investigate the relationship between incentive travel and employee motivation.

In his conceptual article, Richards argues for a more inclusive view of the role of events in the social system. As an eventful city, Barcelona is the urban context chosen to illustrate how the contrasting dynamic of pulsar and iterative events in a city have greater significance in maintaining culture and community and generating powerful new networks, relationships, and practices than has previously been considered. In viewing events as social actors, and applying network theory, Richards contends that there are transformative, longitudinal, local, and world network effects.

Robertson et al. utilize a future studies frame in their conceptual review of the convergence of social and technological change and its influence in determining the success of music festivals of the future. Applying a normative visionary methodology, the article suggests a process of creating prototypes appropriate to the experience and social needs of the future.

In closing, the guest editors wish to thank those who contributed their time and expertise as peer reviewers, importantly informing the final selection of articles for this special issue. We also wish to thank the delegates, keynote speakers, and abstract presenters of the symposia for underpinning the success of the Advancing Event Research Seminar Series. Ultimately, we encourage interested parties to continue the franchise by hosting additional symposia with a view to advancing the Event

Studies field. The importance of bringing together industry, government, and researchers from varied disciplines so as to continue progress on the theoretical underpinning of Events Studies—both adapting theories from other fields and disciplines and proposing indigenous frameworks—cannot be underestimated.

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