

Events and placemaking

Events and festivals have become increasingly important policy tools for cities and regions. They are able to produce a wide range of externalities, including economic impacts, image change, social capital and cultural regeneration. All of these event-related externalities have impacts and effects on the places in which they are staged. In many cases, these event-related impacts are analysed separately, but in fact the most powerful effects of events are more holistic, able to impact not just on individual economic sectors or social groups, but on places as a whole.

Over time, the use of events by cities and regions has grown more sophisticated and complex. The range of policy goals for which events are utilised has expanded, and the range and type of events staged has increased as well. Increasingly, public administrations seek to co-ordinate the events in their jurisdiction to create synergies between events and to maximise the benefits generated. Event policies make frequent references to the development of programmes or “portfolios” of events (Antchak, 2016). The ability of events to effect a broad range of changes in different places has added to their attractiveness as a placemaking tool, and has led to more cities developing “events units” and other forms of event-based interventions (Whitford, 2009). Many cities are also actively engaged in bidding for events such as the European Capital of Culture or the Olympic Games. Some cities may also resort to copying events held elsewhere, or in the most extreme cases, simply “stealing” events from their neighbours (e.g. Van Aalst and van Melik, 2011).

The emergence of coordinated approaches to the management of events by places has, over time, also produced changes in the relationship between events and their host locations. Historically, many events were used as a form of place marketing, essentially to attract attention to their location and to obtain wider recognition of their existence, and to establish specific brand associations (Hall, 1989). As marketing and branding of places became more necessary with increasing globalisation, the role of events was more firmly linked to city marketing and place branding strategies. For example Ashworth (2009, p. 9), in his review of tools for place branding, identified “event hallmarking” as a process “where places organise events, usually cultural or sporting, in order to obtain a wider recognition that they exist but also to establish specific brand associations”. As the term “hallmarking” suggests, places tended to use major events in order to market and brand themselves. This had the advantage of attracting attention, but Ashworth (2009, p. 20) also argued that “hallmark events alone are unlikely to have much impact upon a place brand” and even identified “cases where events have resulted in increasing brand recognition but of an inadequate place product”.

This recognition of the limitations of place marketing and place branding approaches linked to events led in some cases to a broader approach of “placemaking”. Placemaking can be basically summarised as the art of making better places for people. Rather than simply attracting people or attention, the role of events in placemaking is more significant – they should actively improve the host city or region and make them better places to live, work, visit and invest in. Many major events are, therefore, expected to have multiple effects on the places they are held in. Gold and Gold (2017), for example explain, how the Olympic Games have taken on additional objectives for the host cities, from civic and national boosterism to urban regeneration to environmental improvement and social cohesion.

However, most places are too small to host mega events such as the Olympic Games, and the effects of such top-down placemaking efforts are often questionable, as Ashworth (2009) suggests. So in many locations, a more subtle approach to placemaking through events can



be found, which combines larger and smaller events of different types to generate a range of desired placemaking effects. Many locations will have a varied programme of events combining both large scale “pulsar” events that can radically change things and generally smaller “iterative” events that help to support the daily life of the location (Richards, 2015).

A more grass-roots approach to the relationship between events and placemaking is also more in tune with the origins of the placemaking movement as a call to pay more attention to the human scale of places (Jacobs, 1961). Much work in placemaking has centred on the physical improvement of neighbourhoods to improve the quality of the location and the lives of people living there. As the Project for Public Spaces (2009) suggests:

As both an overarching idea and a hands-on approach for improving a neighborhood, city, or region, Placemaking inspires people to collectively reimagine and reinvent public spaces as the heart of every community. Strengthening the connection between people and the places they share, Placemaking refers to a collaborative process by which we can shape our public realm in order to maximize shared value.

Events have always played an important role in this process, because they serve as catalysts to bring people together and to talk about the changes that are needed for their environment. Wyckoff (2014) labels this approach as “standard placemaking”. But, he also identifies other approaches, which he labels as “strategic placemaking,” “creative placemaking,” and “tactical placemaking”. Strategic placemaking, Wyckoff (2014) argues, aims to achieve specific goals in addition to increasing general place quality. It aims to create places “that are uniquely attractive to talented workers so that they want to be there and live there” (p. 5). Creative placemaking, a term created by Markusen and Gadwa (2010), aims to institutionalise arts, culture and creative thinking in all aspects of the built environment. Tactical placemaking uses a “deliberate, often phased approach to change that begins with a short term commitment and realistic expectations that can start quickly” Wyckoff (2014, p. 7), and produce grass-roots change in places. As Wyckoff (2014, p. 1) suggests, “the myriad uses of the term (placemaking) are sometimes confusing and contradictory”.

This diversity of approaches to placemaking is also reflected in the growing literature on events and placemaking. For example, the international conference on “Placemaking and Events” organised in Sydney, Australia in 2002 (Jago and Harris, 2003) covered a range of topics, including community building, branding, human resource management, volunteering, waste management, environmental impacts, urban regeneration, sense of place and social impacts.

Perhaps the main type of studies made so far on the relationship between events and placemaking relates to the role of major events. A number of studies have analysed the use of mega events in the development of neo-liberal approaches to placemaking and promotion (Foley *et al.*, 2011). Contributions to the edited volume by Viehoff and Poynter (2016) on mega-event cities have focussed in the placemaking effects of the Olympic Games held in London, Rio de Janeiro and Turin. A recent volume by Wynn (2015) also underlines the way that many larger places have based their placemaking efforts on music events, with Austin, Texas and Nashville, Tennessee effectively becoming “music cities” in the process.

According to Rota and Salone (2014, p. 91), given the challenges of organising and funding mega events, policy makers have progressively paid more attention to “bottom-up unconventional practices”, such as the Paratissima contemporary art exposition in Turin. This is an itinerant event that is capable of affecting many different areas of the city:

The first edition of Paratissima was held in Turin, in autumn 2005, in a private flat under renovation. In 2006 it was held in a former fur factory. In 2007 it occupied a 19th century building formerly used as a prison. In the four years that followed, the event assumed the form of an art festival diffused in the streets of San Salvario, whereas the last two editions (2012 and 2013) have moved to Turin’s former fruit and vegetables market and its surroundings, in a quite marginalised area of the city (Rota and Salone, 2014, p. 93).

Rota and Salone (2014, p. 92) argue that such “unconventional art initiatives allow for an important effect of aesthetic enjoyment, collective entertainment and social participation within the urban space that we refer to here as the concept of place-making”. Many other studies also emphasise the potential of events as bottom-up placemaking tools. For example, Gibson (2010) has examined the role of arts events, and particularly rural festivals in Australia in placemaking for local communities. Markusen and Gadwa (2010) describe how “in smaller towns, traditional cultural practices and landscapes are transformed into distinctive cultural centers and festivals that revive emptying downtowns and attract regional visitors”. They highlight the Fire and Water Festival in the small community of Arnaudville, Louisiana (population 1,057) and other events have helped to rejuvenate the cultural life of the town.

But small places can also engage in placemaking through relatively large events as well. For example, Kraft (2006) looked at the way in which the Nelson Mandela concert in Tromsø, Norway in had a role in “ritualizing place” and helping to put this Arctic city on the map. She argues that “events are shaped by a global discourse, which emphasizes the uniqueness of place and locality. Through the staging of mega events, people are provided with opportunities for thinking about themselves and their locality”.

Events have been particularly frequently used as a means of regenerating places suffering from economic decline. Saylor (2016) describes how the CITY of NIGHT event helped to regenerate Silo City, a run-down industrial area of Buffalo, New York. In the case of Berlin Stevens and Ambler (2010) analyse the role of urban beaches in “post-Fordist” placemaking. The use of these beaches effectively becomes an event in itself:

The informality of the material artifice of these beaches is complemented by their use by a very wide demographic for informal socializing and play, sports, programmed cultural events and casual drinking and dining. Another defining characteristic of city beach developments is that they are temporary and mobile. They often change location. Most only operate in the warmer months, and are removed and stored during the winter (p. 516).

Rota and Salone (2014) also argue that the essentially temporary nature of events may mean they have uneven and unpredictable placemaking effects (particularly in the case of mega events), but many events also have a regular and rhythmic relationship with places, often being a fixture in the cultural life of a location over decades or even centuries. Their view is that “alternative circuits for the production and consumption of the urban space can be more successfully developed in areas with a strong social and relational capital and distinctive urban identity” (Rota and Salone, 2014, p. 96).

Given the wide range of approaches to placemaking through events, the papers in this special issue provide different views on this rapidly developing relationship. The aim of this special issue is to analyse the emerging trends in the events landscape, drawing on specific cases and comparative analyses and to trace potential development directions for events as placemaking tools. One of the basic questions that emerged from the discussion of these issues among the authors was: do events serve the placemaking needs of the city or region, or does the place increasingly shape itself to serve events? In the past, placemaking has been seen as a locally-based process of physical development, whereas (major) events have often been used as a top-down tool for national or global image-building. The papers presented here provide contributions that go some way to analysing these potential tensions.

The Cervantino International Festival in Guanajuato, Mexico is the object of research by Barrera-Fernández and Hernández-Escampa. This major Latin American event was assessed through a mixed methodology involving the Event Experience Scale (de Geus *et al.*, 2015) and interviews with public administrators. The first editions of Cervantino were celebrated in a nearby mining site, a tribute to the unique industrial heritage of the surroundings of the town. The festival became a major touristic attraction for the city, with its mining past and rich

historical monuments, and the city was placed on the UNESCO World Heritage List. The festival, which is based on a foreign figure with whom there was no a priori link to the city, seems to have led to more than just a temporary effect, as Cervantes has become knitted into the imaginary of this place, which has gained new meaning.

Coghlan *et al.* (2017) report on a collaborative research process between researchers and a precinct manager to redesign a Sand Safari event held on the Gold Coast, Australia. The research process itself was investigated to analyse the degree to which it assisted in the (re)design of the event towards its goal of encouraging a family-friendly, beach-centred culture within the precinct. It documents how the concept of placemaking can be translated into the actual design of an event within a place. Alongside economic impact measures, the research also assessed the broader impact in the event experience and on the local community by analysing participant generated images, along with a survey. Although most of the literature on placemaking deals with bottom-up community events and their sense of place, this paper also pays attention to the powerbrokers and their ability to complement their economic agenda with placemaking concepts (such as sense of place and liveability). It shows that even in a top-down setting, collaborative dialogue can broaden the discussion of the event's role in shaping perceptions of place.

Fountain and Mackay (2017) use longitudinal research over three decades to depict the co-evolution of Akaroa's French festival and of its rural environment. As the authors put it, this festival is based on a brief moment in time (French settlement in the nineteenth century). The festival therefore gives a partial account of Akaroa's story, which has been negotiated through time with various stakeholders. Not only event organisers, such as the Christchurch City Council and the Comté de Paris, have a key influence. Newcomers also take pride in protecting and defending the heritage of their new home. The festival also seems to have different meanings for different audiences, whether they are residents, French descendants, or visitors. To balance these meanings (e.g. fun or remembrance) it is critical to keep the festival from becoming a "tourist place myth".

Garay and Soledad investigate Mercat de Música Viva de Vic (MMVV), a music fair held in Vic, Catalonia in Spain. The event is predominantly for music professionals and has become a reference point for the music industry in Southern Europe. In particular the authors looked into the role of social media in the construction of the image of the host city, Vic. The "conversation" between the event organisers, music professionals and the audience was analysed on one social medium platform (Twitter). The authors concluded that MMVV has become a "brand" associated with the city and its public spaces, and that the social media communication is weighted by emotional value, reflecting emotional attachment to the event. The image created of Vic is eventually the result of a collaborative process, traceable on social media, in which it is no longer possible to distinguish between brand image producers and consumers. As the authors put it "branding is becoming a more inclusive process" and cities and event organisers can only benefit from this awareness.

The emergence of such collaborative processes also reflects the shift analysed in the contribution by Richards from place branding to placemaking. He argues that events are no longer simply a support for a place brand, but can also be an integral part of the making of places. Taking the example of the Dutch city of 's-Hertogenbosch (Den Bosch), the paper uses survey data, depth interviews and policy document analysis to analyse how events can contribute to placemaking processes. Richards argues that a long-term holistic approach is needed in which place-based resources are given meaning for place stakeholders through the creative use of symbols and narrative. In the Den Bosch case the key was moving from a traditional event-focussed city marketing system into a broader approach to events linked by the medieval painter Hieronymus Bosch as figurehead. This not only allowed the city to communicate more clearly with internal stakeholders, but also linked it to international cultural networks. These provided the lever for organising a programme around the

500th anniversary of the painter's death which attracted record number of visitors as well as increasing social cohesion.

Staiff and Bushell compare an ancient festival (*Lai Heua Fai*, festival of light) with a young festival founded only six years previously (Luang Prabang Film Festival). These both take place in Luang Prabang, a former royal capital in Laos and a UNESCO World heritage site. While *Lai Heua Fai* is celebrated outside Luang Prabang (throughout Buddhist countries), the Luang Prabang Film Festival brings Asian film to the city. Both connect Luang Prabang to a large network of places in Southeast Asia, and beyond. As the authors argue, both these events, "connect past, present and future", and they draw on place to creating a "symbiotic co-dependent relationship" in which placemaking is the result of "ongoing dynamic processes" where the traditional and contemporary meet. The research is based on fieldwork carried out between 2008 and 2016.

So, all in all this special issue covers a diversity of topics on the relationship between events and placemaking illustrated by festivals and other events in Australia, Laos, Mexico, New Zealand, and Europe (Spain and the Netherlands).

To round up our discussion, we would like to come back to the question of whether events serve the place, or does the place serve events? The different cases in this special issue present both top-down initiatives based on image-making as well as bottom-up processes of place-based community and cultural development. The indications seem to be that successful event-based placemaking has to involve recursive processes in which the event gains strength from the place it is embedded in, and the place gains leverage in local and wider networks through the image and identity building effects of the event. Ideally such processes also need to be considered in a long-term, longitudinal perspective, because many of the event-related placemaking effects will only become visible over the longer term. This is still a major challenge for event researchers, who are often necessarily focussed on the more short term impacts of ephemeral phenomena.

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