

The Festival State: Differing Perspectives on the Role of Events

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Abstract

Events are often used by destination marketers to attract tourists, and politicians are pleased to make claims about the resulting economic benefits. However, the rising concern about the social impacts of events (Arcodia & Whitford, 2007; Derrett, 2003; Wood, 2006) has brought attention to the need to examine whether industry objectives also meet residents needs. This paper describes the results of a study that adopted this focus. It explored the nature of the events industry in Adelaide, South Australia and the extent to which events meet the needs of young residents. Issues relating to the success of the Adelaide events industry are discussed, by comparing the views of representatives of the events industry with those of young, local residents.

Interviews with seven tourism industry members from six different organisations in Adelaide were conducted to provide a detailed overview of the industry. The perspectives of young people were gained by conducting focus groups with 16 to 17 year old high schools students (n=24) in the inner metropolitan area of Adelaide. Results of this data collection show that the events industry has many major events, however few are attended by young people as a result of events being targeted at older age groups. Other issues such as the great competition for events and the poor marketing of events were emphasized as factors that inhibit the success of the Adelaide events industry. In conclusion this paper draws attention to the differences in industry perspectives and resident perspectives and suggests that community consultation should be used to help bridge the gap between what the industry is providing and what young residents want.

Keywords: social impact, event policy, event target markets

Introduction

South Australia is known as the Festival State and makes this pronouncement on vehicle number plates issued in the state. Such a position is consistent with the view that events can

be used to make a destination distinctive (Jago, Chalip, Brown, Mules, & Ali, 2003). However, there has been increased competition to host events in recent years and it is becoming increasingly important to be innovative in event design and to ensure that established events bring maximum benefits for all stakeholders including the local community.

Adelaide has one of the oldest populations in Australia with many services directed towards this section of the community. This has an impact on the amount of resources that are allocated to the needs of the city's young people; yet an ability to attract young people should be a key goal of destinations with an aging population (Kotler, Haider, & Rein, 1993). It is true that cities do have to provide for the profile of current residents; however it is necessary to consider the future of the city and plan for this. Through the provision of enjoyable activities and a lively atmosphere, Adelaide will be a more attractive place for young people.

Local residents are a key market for events in terms of attendance and their overall support. Adelaide hosts the majority of the events held in South Australia because it is the state capital and a high proportion of the states' residents live in the city (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009a). The events range from community events that appeal to local residents to hallmark events that attract interstate and international visitors. Many of the events are annual or biennial events and have been held for numerous years. The Adelaide Festival of the Arts has made the city famous for its cultural events; whilst sporting events, such as Tour Down Under cycling race and the Clipsal 500 V8 car race capture considerable media attention and have affected the city's image. In comparison Mules (1998) identifies that Melbourne has positioned itself as the 'sporting capital of Australia' through events. The city is well-known as the host of events such as the Australian Open Tennis Tournament, the Grand Prix and the Melbourne Golf Open. As such, Melbourne has developed an international competitive advantage through its successful staging of sports events (Stokes, 2008). The desire to use events to market the destination is highly competitive, nationally and internationally. This paper outlines the strategy for event development that has been adopted in Adelaide before discussing attitudes towards events in the host community.

Background/Literature

The Tourism Australia Act 2004 states that the national tourism organisation should have a division that concentrates on events (Stokes, 2008). In addition, most states in Australia now have organisations or divisions which focus on event management and develop event strategies for the state. The event tourism bodies may be separate organisations or they may be a part of the state tourism body. In the case of South Australia, Events SA is a department within the South Australian Tourism Commission. Events SA has clear objectives that include responsibility for managing the Tour Down Under and Tasting Australia. It also sponsors other events that are considered to be key elements of the state's events calendar.

The strategy of hosting events by event bodies, such as Events SA, is based on a desire to increase visitation to the destination by developing events as tourist attractions. Events can play a role in destination development by helping to expand the tourist season, spread tourism geographically, shape the image of the destination, and by using events as a catalyst for urban renewal and tourism infrastructure development (Getz, 1991). It can be seen that many of these developmental goals are focused on tourism rather than the local community. This raises the question of whether the events are developed with the community's interest in mind. The goal for tourism bodies is to increase the number of tourists, and this is reflected by the emphasis that has been placed on tourism and tourists in the events literature (Boo & Busser, 2006; Getz, 2008; Lee & Crompton, 2003; Saleh & Ryan, 1993). This paper considers how well an events strategy caters for the needs of the resident population.

Research on events organisations and their strategies have revealed that there are different strategic planning techniques (Stokes, 2008). There is the need to develop strategic plans before and after individual events (Bramwell, 1997), although it is also necessary to have an integrated plan for events and to have a clear objective in mind. Studies have focused on the ideal situation of formal planning for events (Bramwell, 1997; Stokes, 2008) in which the plans are documented. Edinburgh, Scotland, is a great example of event planning and strategic management. In 2001, the city developed the Edinburgh Festivals Strategy, which was the result of discussions with key stakeholders and core groups (i.e. Joint Festival Working Group), as well as research including benchmarking the Edinburgh festivals against other cities (Ensor, Robertson, & Ali-Knight, 2008). This strategy was developed simultaneously with an Events Strategy for Edinburgh, which was launched at the end of

2002 (Ensor, et al., 2008). However in interviewing event tourism experts, Stokes (2008) found that a large proportion use the reactive/proactive approach to strategic planning. This response may be due to the ever changing nature of the events industry wherein destinations bid for events then react in different ways depending on whether or not they won the event. Getz (1997) supports this result by stating that very few destinations actually have written event tourism strategies, even though it would be beneficial. Even though explicit policies are rarely formulated for events, the needs of groups are sometimes implicitly recognised. This paper examines the extent to which policies that reflect the needs of young people should feature more prominently.

Another issue in regards to planning is the number of stakeholders that are involved in the process. Getz (1997) suggests that a number of stakeholders should be included in the event management process, including government agencies as well as local citizens. Jaeger and Mykletun (2009) found that festivals have greater meaning for people that are involved in organising them. This finding suggests that residents may not feel as strongly about events and may not be as satisfied with events as the tourism industry which is involved in the event management process. Prior to event management and planning, the needs of the stakeholders should be taken into account as well as those of the potential attendees (Lade & Jackson, 2004). The event managers need to develop an event that appeals to the intended audience, but also satisfies the needs of the stakeholders. It is not only the experience while at the event that determines an attendees' satisfaction. Managerial factors such as access to the event program and the purchase of tickets before the event need to be carefully planned (Morgan, 2008). The event design is also important in creating a unique and memorable event.

The reasons for event failure are not only based on strategic planning, in fact Getz (2000a) describes five categories of why events fail: marketing/planning, external forces, human resources, financial resources, and organisational culture. On the other hand, Ensor, Robertson and Ali-Knight (2008) have developed categories to explain the success of events: leadership, focus, relationship with local community, decision making style, funding, and history of festival. Management understanding is also vital to the success of events (Getz, 2000b).

In terms of catering for the needs of the intended audience, motivations that influence event attendance can differ between participants (Crompton & McKay, 1997; Filo, Funk, & O'Brien, 2008). Interest in the particular event activities may contribute to the motivations of attendees (Scott & Shafer, 2001). For example, an attendee at the Tour Down Under Cycling race in Adelaide may have a specific interest in cycling and therefore may be more committed to the event. A crowd of 762,000 people attended the Tour Down Under this year (Willes & Kemp, 2010), many of which would be cycling enthusiasts, however others may have attended the event for the opportunity to socialise. Consequently, this paper will focus on the perceptions of the young resident population and whether their needs are considered in the events industry planning.

Method

Interviews were conducted with employees from key organisations involved in the Adelaide tourism industry. In order to gain a wide range of perspectives, seven people from six different organisations were interviewed. Respondents were asked questions about marketing Adelaide and then more specific questions on the events that are held in Adelaide. The interviews were semi-structured and followed a list of key topics that the researcher defined prior to the interviews. The key topics discussed in the interviews included issues associated with destination image, positioning and distribution channels. Discussions specific to events focused on those events which the interviewee perceived to have important implications for Adelaide, how these events contribute to the image of Adelaide and the target market for such events. They were also asked whether Adelaide offers enough events that cater to the needs of young people. In addition, discussions were held with 16 and 17 year olds who live in the inner metropolitan area of Adelaide. This took the form of four focus groups with 4-8 students per group. The purpose of choosing this particular age group is that they are starting to think about their future and whether they will stay in Adelaide. The Australia Bureau of Statistics (2008) shows that interstate migration increases rapidly around the age of 20. The provision of events that are considered to be attractive by young people may improve Adelaide for young people and therefore give them more reason to stay in the city.

Ethical procedures made it necessary to gain approval from the principals of schools that agreed to participate in the research. An appropriate time had to be found to conduct the focus groups and the students had to volunteer to participate in the research. It was necessary

for a consent form to be signed by the participants and their parents. The researcher was required to have a police background check. The focus groups were conducted with students from four different schools in order to gain perspectives from a range of socio-economic backgrounds. They were semi-structured and covered a number of key issues in regards to the leisure time activities of the students and the events they attend. In regards to events, discussion focused on how frequently the participants attended events, the reasons why they attended specific events, and the importance of events to their lifestyle.

Both the interviews and focus groups were transcribed and, then analysed using NVIVO to determine the key themes. Comparisons between the perceptions of the tourism industry and young people were made in relation to Adelaide events.

Results

Out of seven interviewees, five were male and two were female. The two interviewees from the same organisation were from different departments (one from the marketing department and the other from the events department). There were 24 participants for the student focus groups. Eight of these participants were male and sixteen were female. Despite the majority of participants being Caucasian, many come from varying backgrounds which reflects the integrated multi-cultural society of Australia. Due to this, the development of events in Adelaide considers a culturally diverse range of ethnicities.

Interviews with members of the tourism industry revealed the target market for tourism are people aged between 45 and 60, but in contrast the target market for events is diverse and differs dependent upon the event. The fact that many special interest events target specific groups was confirmed by the focus group participants who perceived that there are few events for young people to attend as a result of the focus on interest-specific events.

Interview results

In discussing events, each of the tourism industry members considered events to be vital to the marketing and future positioning of Adelaide. Being a city that lacked major tourism icons, it is important for Adelaide to capitalise on the events it hosts as a point of differentiation. One interviewee especially mentioned that local support is fundamental to the events industry, as tourists are not going to come from overseas or interstate unless the local

community believes in the worth of the event. Some events, for example, Christmas Pageant and the Royal Adelaide Show are purely local and did not aim to attract tourists.

The mix of events that Adelaide hosts is considered a positive attribute, however like many other destinations Adelaide struggles to develop events in the winter months. The event season tends to go from November to March, with a particularly busy period in February and March. Another positive attribute of many Adelaide events is the fact that they have grown out of people's passions. An example of this is the Tour Down Under, which was an idea of Mike Turtur – a former Olympic cyclist. Having this passion behind the events means that they are not just commercial activities, but rather they are events that represent the interests of groups within the host community. Of course, not all residents will have similar interests and therefore these events could alienate some within the host community.

A prominent result that came from these interviews was the need for events to provide an economic impact; which could be politically motivated because of the vested interests of stakeholders. Perspectives on hosting more events to cater for young people varied, with one industry member commenting that the economic impact would not be high and therefore they did not perceive this to be a viable option. Most other industry members saw the value of introducing more events for young people, including one respondent who stated that *“economic impact is important, but you can do that without sacrificing the engagement with the community”*. In addition, discussions related to the importance of community values and linking events to Government initiatives such as encouraging a healthy lifestyle. It was also suggested that media value and the legacy of the event are key deciding factors for hosting events.

Another interesting outcome of the interviews was the issues that the respondents noted about the Adelaide events industry. Negative attributes of the industry include seasonality and the lack of supporting services for events. In terms of supporting services, comment was made of the low number of hotels as well as their proximity to restaurants and the lack of event packages that combine transport, accommodation and event tickets. Some event packages are available through the South Australian Tourism Commission (South Australian Tourism Commission, 2010), however these are not heavily marketed and travel agencies who have more marketing power do not advertise event packages for Adelaide. Competitiveness is

another issue that is affecting the events industry. As more destinations have become interested in events in order to achieve economic goals and marketing initiatives, the competitiveness of the industry has increased. Interviewees commented on the fact that other cities in Australia have learnt from the successes of Adelaide and now have similar events. Larger cities in Australia have greater budgets and bidding power than Adelaide and can afford to market and broadcast their events more such as through television. Adelaide therefore, has had to shift its focus and bid for events that are less likely to attract the interest of bigger cities, such as the Australian Masters Games. A prime example of the competitiveness of the industry is the loss of the Grand Prix to Melbourne. However, losing this event caused Adelaide to rethink its event strategy and resulted in Events SA (formerly Australian Major Events) developing new events to take its place. The interviews ascertained that the Adelaide events industry tends to be reactive rather than proactive and suggested that this is another issue that is preventing Adelaide from being competitive in terms of events. On the other hand, there are some positive attributes of Adelaide that are beneficial to the events industry. These attributes include the small size of Adelaide and the ease of which one can walk around the city centre from one event site to another. In a smaller city like Adelaide it is easier for the whole city to be aware of the event, whereas in larger cities some events may be overlooked because the event does not take over the city. The smaller size also helps in the organisation of events, as key event industry people know each other well and can collaborate easily.

Focus group results

It is important to note that young people in Adelaide are not a homogenous group and therefore perceptions and motivations differ amongst them. However this study will report on the common themes discussed by young people in the focus groups. From the young peoples' perspective, positive and negative attributes about Adelaide events were noted. The most popular events for young people to attend were the Royal Adelaide Show, Clipsal 500, the Adelaide Fringe Festival and Soundwave Music Festival. In contrast to this, when asked which events were most significant for Adelaide, tourism industry members talked predominantly about the Tour Down Under as well as the Adelaide Festival of Arts, the Adelaide Fringe Festival, Clipsal 500 and WOMADelaide. Even though some of these events overlap, these results illustrate the differing preferences between young people and the city's tourism industry. Interestingly, much of the discussion about the significance of the Tour

Down Under was based around the awareness the event creates for Adelaide and its marketing capability.

For the young people, on the other hand, the events were about having the opportunity to do something different and socialise with friends. Being under the age of 18, the respondents feel that there is not much to do in the evenings in Adelaide because they are not able to go to the pubs or clubs in which older people socialise. Events can provide an arena in which young people can be involved; however some music events, like the Future Music Festival, only allow people over the age of 18 to attend. The respondents discussed how events, such as the Adelaide Fringe Festival, create an exciting and festival atmosphere in Adelaide. Particularly on the Fringe opening night, when there is a parade in the city centre, Adelaide becomes a vibrant place that is full of activity and people.

Despite the recognition of the Royal Adelaide Show as an event that young people attend, it was implied that attendance at this event tended to be due to habit and lack of other events being held at that time of year (early September). Many of the respondents commented on the increasing price and repetition of the entertainment available at the Show. One respondent in particular stated that more entertainment needs to be created for teenagers as most of it is aimed towards young children and families. Some respondents also noted a lack of marketing of some of the smaller events, and therefore they did not know about the event until it had already occurred.

Discussion

This study has illustrated that Adelaide does achieve some of the goals which destinations aim for by hosting events. The Tour Down Under helps to achieve geographic dispersion of tourists, which Getz (1991) notes as being a catalysing factor for destination development. The Tour Down Under holds stages throughout the state as well as stages in the city centre of Adelaide. Most of the rural locations are within an hours' drive of Adelaide making it possible for people to reach the locations relatively easily. Many of the interviewees also noted the potential for events to influence the image of Adelaide, which, according to Getz (1991), is another justification for hosting events.

Drawing upon the literature on event tourism, both the industry members and the young people indicated issues previously identified by Getz (2000a) as factors that influence the success of an event. The industry representatives noted that a lack of funding inhibits Adelaide's competitiveness and ability to market events to their full potential. This lack of marketing was confirmed by the young people who commented that they are unaware of some of the events being held in Adelaide, unless it is one of the major events that are used to promote Adelaide, such as the Adelaide Fringe Festival and the Tour Down Under.

In terms of competitiveness, some industry members seem to think that Adelaide has lost its place as the market leader of events in Australia. The Festival State slogan is a prime indication of how South Australia has made its name through events and festivals. This slogan continues to be used by residents and is perceived to be a key attribute of Adelaide. However, this title was given to South Australia many years ago and since then interest in events has grown in other destinations across Australia and the wider world (Getz, 1997). The city is now losing out on events that it once could have won the bid for. Having less financial support for events than larger cities on the Eastern coast of Australia also reflects on the ability of Adelaide to market its events. Adelaide tends to be reactive and needs to be more proactive. Despite the reactive/proactive strategy being the most commonly used strategy in event tourism planning (Stokes, 2008), it is especially important for the destination to be proactive otherwise it will not create a strategic advantage. A destination that is just reactive is less likely to have clearly thought out its event mix and the image that it wishes to portray. One of the strategic objectives of the tourism plan for South Australia, is to bid for new events, secure one mega event, and develop a more balanced events calendar by hosting events in the winter months (South Australian Tourism Commission, 2009). Other tourism organisations within Adelaide, such as the Adelaide City Council, also incorporate events into their strategic planning. However, there is no specific events plan that has been developed that outlines the precise goals of the Adelaide event industry. The importance of events was acknowledged in the interviews; nonetheless this is yet to result in a concrete events strategy.

Adelaide has a number of interest-specific events that have grown out of individuals' passions. These events were not strategically planned; instead they were suggested by those interested in the specific interests such as cycling. Despite this, most of the major events still

manage to fit with the image that Adelaide is trying to portray. The Adelaide Fringe Festival, the Adelaide Festival of Arts and WOMADelaide confirm the cultural and artistic dimension of Adelaide, whereas the Tour Down Under fits in with the promotion of Adelaide being a Green City. Despite the perception that events that grow out of passion represent the interests of the community and therefore will encourage community engagement, the focus group respondents indicated that this can limit which events they attend because they do not tend to go to events that have a theme that they are not interested in. Young people want to go to events with their friends and will make the decision to attend events within their friendship group. Not all friends will be interested in a specific event, and therefore they are less likely to attend.

The young people specifically indicated an interest in music events, however this did not apply to WOMADelaide which most had never attended. Instead, they are interested in music events such as the Soundwave Music Festival and the Big Day Out. If the Adelaide events industry were to capitalise on this market, then they could aim to develop a music event that is specific to Adelaide. This may also attract more young people to Adelaide, therefore achieving the goal of making Adelaide a more vibrant place.

Two of the events that young people found to be the most favourable are not unique to Adelaide as they are events that are held all over Australia. These events are the Royal Adelaide Show and the Soundwave Music Festival. This result indicates the different priorities of the tourism industry and young people. The tourism industry wants to develop events that differentiate Adelaide and achieve economic goals, and on the other hand the young people just want something different to do that appeal to their interests. This suggests that perhaps the tourism industry is too focused on place marketing strategies in terms of events and need to be more considerate of what the residential community wants. Ensor, Robertson and Ali-Knight (2008) confirm the importance of creating a relationship with the community to the success of events. As one interviewee mentioned, local support for the event is important as a high percentage of attendees are from the resident population. Local support is required for the event to be able to grow and attract interstate and international visitors. Therefore, the local residents' opinion is vital because it is at the core of the potential event development. The focus on the economic impact seems to dictate the events industry to the point that the needs of the resident population are not being considered. A key example of

this is the Skyshow, a free fireworks display held in the city centre of Adelaide. It was cancelled because it experienced a financial loss. Due to public support for the event, it will be held in 2010 for the first time in many years. This example illustrates that events can have social significance and therefore the decision to host events should not be based on purely economic factors.

Community consultation should be a key factor in the development of the Adelaide events industry. However, it has been noted that community consultation does not represent the views of the whole community due to the small number of people who are asked or volunteer to be involved (Carpenter & Brownill, 2008). Young people rarely have a voice in the political process and are unable to influence decisions concerning events. The needs of business leaders and measures of economic impacts are more powerful elements in community politics. In addition, community representatives often have their own agendas, and in many situations they are the minority of the planning group. Fischer and Forester (1993 in Hall & Jenkins, 1995) assert that policy and planning is interrelated with power and politics and as a result of this the concerns of some are heard and others are excluded. In an ideal situation, policy planning would lead to development that is consistent with community needs (Michael & Hall, 2007). Stevenson, Airey and Miller (2008) explain that tourism policy making is complex because it spans over a wide range of areas. Therefore, difficulty in policy and planning may be one reason why there is a gap between the industry perspective and the needs of young residents.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to outline the different perspectives of the tourism industry and the resident population. The results of interviews and focus groups identified the most important events to each of these groups. Limitations of this study include the fact that the views of those living outside Adelaide or tourists to Adelaide were not gained, and therefore this study only presents the view from within Adelaide. This study aimed to determine young peoples' opinion as they are a group that are often overlooked. It is suspected that opinions would have differed if an older group had of been consulted.

The results showed that the tourism industry values different events than those of its young residents, apart from two events that overlapped (the Adelaide Fringe Festival and the Clipsal

500). Clearly, there are discrepancies between the industry and this segment of the population. As would be expected the industry are interested in marketing Adelaide, whereas young people are seeking entertainment and an opportunity for social interaction with friends. This raises the question of whether events should respond to community needs or offer innovative new experiences. The tourism industry seems to be more conscious of the economic impact of events, rather than fulfilling the social needs of the resident population. As was illustrated with the case of the Skyshow, community consultation can be important in the decision to host events. This study suggests that greater community consultation in the planning process of the events would benefit the events industry; as long as the community group represents the community and their concerns are considered. Young people could also be proactive in developing events that would appeal to them. As can be seen with many of the other examples of events in Adelaide, they have grown out of peoples' passions and have evolved from this.

As well as providing a comparison of which events each group found most important, a number of issues about the events industry arose. Competition from other states and the lack of funding were key issues mentioned by industry members. Despite the increase in competition, the results of this study showed that the most important events were those that have been held for many years (with the exception of Soundwave Music Festival). Many of the focus group respondents indicated that they have been to most of these events which suggests that they form a relationship with these events and that attendance is likely to result in repeat visitation. These are the most important events to young people because they match their interests and are held every year (with the exception of the Adelaide Festival of Arts which is held biennially) so the residents can make plans to attend.

Finally, it is important to note that the Adelaide events industry suffers from a lack of planning and a written strategic plan for events does not exist. By having a solid plan, and one that is proactive not just reactive, Adelaide will be able to plan for events in the future and develop a strategy to retain its reputation as the Festival State. In conclusion, Adelaide needs to have a strategic plan for events and be mindful of both attracting tourists and delivering what the resident population want.

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