

Work in Progress Paper

Strategic Analysis for Organisational Development of the Festival City Theatres Trust

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Abstract

Edinburgh's festivals have traditionally been world renowned for their eclecticism. As their number grew and reach widened the coordination of the festivals became a complex and demanding organisational task for managers, and venue owners/operators introduced greater professionalism to tackle the challenges. With an increasing number of stakeholders and growing national and international competition the festival venue operators embraced managerialism in organisational processes. Economic realism (rather than social welfare) was upgraded to inform the ethos in any public spending and privatisations in services were introduced in line with galloping commercialisation in leisure consumption. Edinburgh's festival venue organisers have not been immune to rapid structural changes in Britain. The paper will seek to 1) evaluate the circumstances faced by a major festival venue operator as perceived by its key stakeholders 2) discuss the implications of these perceptions on the organisations future growth and development and 3) compare the organisations' developmental trajectory to those of festival linked venue operators of similar standing in the UK and overseas. The case study methodology employed will allow the in-depth analysis of the venue organisation's goals and risks jeopardising their achievement as well as perceived structural and environmental circumstances and a holistic consideration of the strategic options available in light of benchmarking data from the other institutions. The results of the data collection that will follow are intended to reveal the nature of stakeholders' assumptions and the variety of approaches evidenced in the broader institutional environment of the venue organisation.

Keywords: festival, venue, organisation, development, strategic, analysis, growth

Introduction

'Culture should be for the many not the few. And the few must not be the only ones to experience or create the most brilliant productions or the most outstanding works of art...

'It is absolutely central to my politics that excellence should be accessible and access should be to excellence.'

Jack McConnell, First Minister

St Andrew's Day Speech, 30 November 2003

The roles played by 'culture' in displaying, debating and defining a nation's identity have been the subject of debate across generations and communities. A drive to tell and retell the narrative of a country and its people explicitly underpins a great deal of the cultural expression experienced by its citizens and visitors, a force which runs alongside the plethora of cultural influences they are subjected to every day. It is perhaps little surprise therefore that politicians, including Scotland's First Minister, should seek to contribute to these aspects of their constituents' lives, influencing and shaping the debate. Cultural expression, particularly through performance, can be divisive, it can be challenging and it exists between popular and niche interests, possibly inaccessible to many. Regardless, the artists, funders and institutions that support it are subject to a variety of broader environmental factors that affect their ability to control their own destinies – quite apart from any attempts to predict the future trends within their specific art forms, or the industry as a whole. The Festival City Theatres Trust (FCTT) is one such institution in Edinburgh, established in July 1998 to manage the city's 'Festival Theatre' and 'King's Theatre' (with seating capacities of 1,915 and 1,359 respectively) (FCTT, 2009:5). This paper seeks to summarise the rationale behind the Trust's work and the benefits accrued to Edinburgh and Scotland through its continued success, while also looking ahead to its future and asking to what extent it can meet its stakeholders' expectations and retain their support. This is set within a context of strategic management literature that invites contributions from the political, economic, cultural and social contexts in which the Trust operates. Primary research will be conducted to establish the views of some of the Trust's most important partners, while case study analysis will illuminate the efforts made by similar organisations in other cities to cement growth in their work.

The opening to the Trust's 2009-2013 Business Plan strikes an optimistic tone, confirming to its stakeholders that it 'is in the fortunate position presently of having found its feet artistically and financially' (FCTT, 2009:1). The ambition of the Trust is clear to see, too, claiming that it 'is imperative that the Trust maintains a forward moving momentum that can help it achieve its greater ambitions', rather than lapse into former difficulties and uncertainty (FCTT, 2009:1). Such considerations are driven by a need to maintain the strategic viability of the venues, quite apart from the artistic choices that shape the programmes of the two theatres. To this end, while Jack McConnell's ambitions may be shared by the Trust in terms of granting access to excellence, further considerations must be borne in mind by its board. The Business Plan notes a number of financial constraints on the ability of the Trust to carry out its objectives – such as the expectation of static grant subsidies from the City of Edinburgh Council and the Scottish Arts Council in the coming years, as well as the loss of previously bankable performing companies in the coming years such as Scottish Opera and the Royal Scottish National Orchestra (FCTT, 2009:8-9). Nevertheless, the two theatres continue to fulfil their unique roles in Edinburgh's cultural landscape, with the potential for

further diversification already identified in reports such as the ‘City Cultural Venues Study’ (PMP, 2009:109). If the Trust’s own ambitions for ongoing investment and development can be shown to contribute to plans for the city as a whole, they ultimately help their public sector stakeholders achieve their own ambitions, and thus stand a better chance of gaining their support.

The material that follows aims to review related literature from the areas of cultural management and strategic analysis and discusses the nature of the Trust’s operating environment and the resources available to its management to achieve its goals; specifically those which seek to consolidate its role as a leading voice in Scotland’s artistic and festival industries. Four main sections follow: a review of relevant literature, reports and other resources available via desk research; a discussion of the chosen methods of primary research; and a series of conclusions on the work undertaken to date.

Literature Review

Edinburgh takes cultural provision and leadership seriously and it is little surprise that numerous documents are available for consultation. The most relevant of these will be discussed below, yet it is possible to identify common threads within the limited number of sources that have already been introduced. Both the Trust’s Business Plan and the PMP Cultural Venues Study highlight a need for leadership within the city’s cultural infrastructure. Whether this stems from ‘Innovation and uniqueness in programming... [demanding] that the Trust continues to take a leading role in consortia comprised of like minded venues’, or PMP’s research findings that there is a ‘perceived lack of clarity’ regarding who has responsibility for the ‘crucial development and progress of the cultural life of Edinburgh’ (FCTT, 2009:30; PMP, 2009:162). Likewise both reports draw their readers’ attention to the current state of (dis)repair that some of the city’s venues are in, with the King’s Theatre singled out in particular. Drawing on this wealth of existing research provides an initial understanding of the views of the Trust’s key stakeholders, both internal and external to the business itself. This opportunity is made all the more valuable by the wealth of documents which were consulted by PMP when drawing up their report, thus contributing to a considerable body of existing work (PMP, 2009). The discussion that follows aims to describe the contributions of such sources to the Trust’s strategic planning environment, while also drawing on relevant literature that can provide an academic and theoretical context for the work.

Urban Cultural Strategy

Bernadette Quinn sets her work on urban festivals in a changing historical context, whereby in the 1980s and 1990s western cities ‘were no longer functioning as landscapes of production but as landscapes of consumption’ (Quinn, 2005:930). As such progressive modern conurbations now seek to appeal to a more skilled workforce and resident community, as well as using festivals and events to project their image to an increasingly globalised world. To this end it is little surprise that Edinburgh’s events strategy prioritises events that ‘encourage people and businesses to live in, invest in and visit Edinburgh’ and ‘strengthen the city’s international relations and international development work’ (City of Edinburgh Council, 2007:10). The city’s festivals strategy is similarly keen to promote these phenomena as vital parts of Edinburgh’s cultural offering, ‘satisfactorily balancing the

demands of creative ambition, social objectives and commercial viability’ (Graham Devlin Associates, 2001:31). A sustainable and professional venue infrastructure is the foundation for these ambitions, facilitating the world’s pre-eminent festivals and year round programming fit for a capital city.

Cities such as Edinburgh exist in a competitive marketplace, seeking to attract tourists, commercial enterprises, media attention and status, and their cultural strategies now have important parts to play (Quinn, 2005:931). In Edinburgh’s case it has inspired groundbreaking reports such as *Thundering Hooves* and the ensuing work being done to promote the interests of the city’s festivals (Scottish Arts Council [SAC], 2006). That report in particular adopted a benchmarking approach between locations, at one point isolating factors that help set a ‘leading festival city’ apart (SAC, 2006:19-21). This has relevance for the current research because of the number of categories that may be affected by venue infrastructure, which include:

- Distinctiveness of location
- Diversity of cultural ecology
- Invading and interacting with the city
- Investment by the public sector
- Developed festival infrastructure for all visiting publics
- Excellent facilities

(SAC, 2006:19-21)

Thundering Hooves is also an important example of how a broadly welcomed report can foster sustainable developments towards achieving demonstrable goals. Since the report’s publication, Edinburgh and its ‘12 major Festivals’ are now served by ‘Festivals Edinburgh’, a ‘high-level organisation... to take the lead on their joint strategic development’ (EdinburghFestivals.co.uk, 2010). With a number of key public sector funders present among its stakeholders, Festivals Edinburgh draws together expertise and resources from across the city’s cultural sector and provides leadership in a way that chimes with the FCTT’s stated objectives. The rewards have so far included a multi-million pound Expo Fund to help showcase Scottish artists and productions, as well as a more collaborative working environment for the organisations involved. This is the environment in which the Trust operates much of the time and it involves a number of its key stakeholders – a reflection perhaps of the ‘potential for more joined-up thinking in the delivery of the arts’ identified in the Business Plan (FCTT, 2009:3).

Quinn’s article reminds us that a number of locations are also taking a more pronounced attitude towards festival provision. The cities she cites include Glasgow, Galway and Avignon (Quinn, 2005:931-939). Meanwhile *Thundering Hooves* looks to Barcelona, Melbourne, Montreal and Singapore as it places Edinburgh in a global context of ‘festival cities’ (SAC, 2006:53-76). A comparative approach is therefore both relevant and necessary in the bid to establish good practise in the area of cultural strategy and (with reference to the Trust) appropriate venue-based provision of resources. A 2007 study of the Wales Millennium Centre in Cardiff explored the relationship between the provision of cultural opportunities and a city’s economic health, arguing that ‘Unless their local economies have proved buoyant throughout the twentieth century’ today’s cities are likely to have a relatively poor artistic offering (Foreman-Peck, 2007:20). In light of this it is encouraging that the PMP study enthusiastically champions Edinburgh’s ‘variety of exceptional cultural spaces’, seeking to build on this ‘by examining the future needs of its residents and visitors, and

planning carefully for their provision' (PMP, 2009:1). Yet the value of the Millennium Centre extends beyond financial sustainability and return on investment – 'The point of the arts is not economic, a means to an end; they are an end in themselves' (Foreman-Peck, 2007:22). To this end Cardiff is now home to a venue which has a vision to 'be an internationally significant cultural landmark and centre for the performing arts, renowned for inspiration, excellence and leadership' (Wales Millennium Centre, 2010). As this research seeks to draw on appropriate examples of good practise in venue management there is potentially a great deal to be learned from Cardiff and other cities in the UK and further afield.

Strategy in Context

Increasingly in the last two decades strategic management related processes are widely employed to holistically address the needs of organisations to plan for their long term future and achieve related aims. As defined by Johnson et al. (2008):

'Strategy is the direction and scope of an organisation over the long term, which achieves advantage in a changing environment through its configuration of resources and competences with the aim of fulfilling stakeholder expectations. Strategy is the pattern of activities followed by an organisation in pursuit of its long term purposes.'

Johnson et al. (2008) review this broader subject area and identify three distinctive parts in the process: strategic analysis, strategic choice and strategy implementation. In effect strategic management represents the continuous process of analysing circumstances, organisational and environmental, considering the options available for future development and then marshalling resources and driving the change to the new positioning. Following establishment in the new position, analysis is once more required to consider future positioning and growth.

For cultural organisations the introduction of strategic management was part and parcel of the prevalence of managerialist ideology. The term 'new public management' or 'new managerialism' is usually taken to refer to some combination of processes and values that was developed as a distinctively different approach from the co-ordination of publicly provided services (Clarke et al. 2000). It is often treated as a coherent whole, of global significance and force, despite the fact that comparative studies have tended to show wide national divergences in reform programmes, albeit often utilising the language or discourse of new managerialism as a means of legitimation and institutionalisation (Flynn 2000). The term in essence, refers to the incorporation and application of private sector management systems and techniques in the public and not for profit services. Some of its features are: introduction of strategic management, specific structural change (such as development of new middle management positions), use of financial efficiency as a measure of organisational effectiveness, the incorporation of market values in public policy areas, the demise of collectivist approaches (e.g. provision on the basis of expert opinion instead of user consultation), the public being seen more as clients and finally, department budgets giving way to contracts with a notionally cheaper and 'better' private provider (Farnham and Horton 1993; Clarke et al. 2000).

The conceptual framework of new managerialism can be meaningfully employed to explain changes in the management of festivals and events. Venue Trusts, local authority culture departments and other arts and cultural clubs that are dependent upon government grant aid have been shaped by public sector initiatives to introduce strategic management and open

them up to private sector investment. The introduction of compulsory competitive tendering in British local government under Conservative governments (Lawrence et al. 1994) has also been espoused by subsequent Labour governments. Since the 1990s arts, culture and sport establishments have been led through modernisation programmes that for many meant a decline in grant aid, the ring fencing of subsidy for special projects, pressures to amalgamate with other bodies for the same artistic or cultural activity, or a change in their legal status and transformation to limited companies. Furthermore calls for the streamlining of decision-making have inadvertently meant a decrease in volunteer control of arts and culture, as voluntary boards have been perceived as inflexible and long-winded, and elected committee structures as inefficient.

A related framework of analysis that has the potential to aid in the analysis of the strategic capability of the FCTT is that of configurational analysis of organisations (Mintzberg, 1979, 1981). This approach makes a clear break from the contingency mainstream, which has been preoccupied with abstracting a limited set of structural concepts like centralisation and formalisation, and measuring their relationships with a limited set of abstracted situational concepts, such as size and technological uncertainty. By synthesising broad patterns from contingency theory's fragmented concepts, and grounding them in rich, multivariate descriptions, the configurational approach may help consolidate the past gains of contingency theory (Meyer et al. 1993). Configurational inquiry assumes an holistic stance, asserting that the parts of a social entity take their meaning from the whole and cannot be understood in isolation. Social systems are seen as tightly coupled amalgams entangled in multi-directional causal loops. Non-linearity is acknowledged, so variables found to be causally related in one configuration may be unrelated or even inversely related in another. In acknowledging that there is more than one way to succeed in each type of setting, the configuration approach explicitly accommodates the important concept of equifinality.

Finally, institutional analysis can arguably inform the researchers' understanding of the broader environment of the organisation under study and thus aid in better capturing its strategic capabilities. The related theory first appeared in the mid-1970s and has generated much interest and attention. It has raised provocative questions about the world of organisations, such as why organisations of the same type, such as schools and hospitals, located in widely scattered locales, so closely resemble one another (Scott 1992). Institutions have been defined as consisting of cognitive, normative, and regulative structures and activities that give stability and meaning to social behaviour (DiMaggio & Powell 1983). The term 'organisational field' is used to describe organisations that in aggregate constitute recognised areas of institutional life: key suppliers, resource and project consumers, regulatory agencies and other organisations that produce similar services or products (DiMaggio & Powell 1983). Similarly, Scott (1992) defines fields as a set of diverse organisations attempting to carry on a common enterprise. In the initial stages of their lifecycle, organisational fields display diversity in approach and form. Once a field becomes well established, however, there is an inexorable push towards homogenisation (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). The concept used in the literature to capture the process of homogenisation is 'isomorphism' and is defined as the constraining process that forces one unit in a population to be like other units that face the same set of environmental conditions (DiMaggio & Powell 1983).

Institutions, according to (Scott 1992) have a regulative, normative and cognitive dimension. Each of the pillars provides a basis for legitimacy, albeit a different one. In resource dependence or social exchange approach to organisation, legitimacy is sometimes treated as simply a different kind of resource. However, from an institutional perspective, legitimacy is not a commodity to be possessed or exchanged but a condition reflecting cultural alignment,

normative support, or consonance with relevant rules or laws. In explaining the conditioning of organisations by institutions in their field, new institutionalists provide a framework that allows the investigation of the interactions among organisations and forces at play that lead to isomorphic change.

Meyer & Rowan (1977) argue that isomorphism with environmental institutions has some crucial consequences for organisations: i) they incorporate elements which are legitimated externally, rather than in terms of efficiency; ii) they employ external or ceremonial assessment criteria to define the value of structured elements and iii) dependence on externally fixed institutions reduces turbulence and maintains stability. Incorporating externally legitimated formal structures increases the commitment of internal participants and external constituents, and the use of external assessment criteria can enable an organisation to remain successful by social definition. However, (DiMaggio & Powell 1983) contend that isomorphism occurs as the result of processes that make organisations more similar without necessarily making them more efficient. Bureaucratisation and other forms of homogenisation emerge they argue, out of the structuration of organisational fields. They identify three mechanisms through which institutional isomorphic change occurs, each with its own antecedents: i) 'coercive isomorphism' that stems from political influence and the problem of legitimacy ii) 'mimetic isomorphism' resulting from standard response to uncertainty and iii) 'normative isomorphism' associated with professionalisation. This list is an analytic one: the types are not always empirically distinct (Powell & DiMaggio 1991). For the purposes of this research and to better understand the viable strategic options open to the FCTT, institutional analysis offers tools that will help decipher pressures that shape the organisation's behaviour and affect its legitimacy for public support.

Research Methods

The research will seek to: 1) evaluate the circumstances faced by a major festival venue operator as perceived by its key stakeholders; 2) discuss the implications of these perceptions on the organisations future growth and development; and 3) compare the organisations' developmental trajectory to those of festival linked venue operators of similar standing in the UK and overseas. A case study methodology can allow the in-depth analysis of the venue organisation's perceived structural and environmental circumstances and a holistic consideration of the strategic options available in light of benchmarking data from the other institutions.

The FCTT 2009-2013 Business Plan sets out the Trust's understanding of its current operating environment through a SWOT analysis (2009, p17) and a more extensive Risk Analysis (pp12-16). The relationship between these environmental factors and the Trust's stated goals (pp4, 18-32) requires further analysis and thus provides the foundation for the primary research in a tri-partite way. As such, two groups of stakeholders will be consulted in order to respond to the first two objectives noted above, before other locations are examined for comparison.

Initially a maximum of two focus groups will be carried out with representatives of the FCTT's internal stakeholders – members of staff who represent relevant departments within the organisation. The rationale behind this approach is to establish what FCTT staff and departments recognise as being the organisation's goals and objectives, SWOT and risks (initially without reference to the Business Plan). This will identify the degree to which the Plan is representative of deviant opinions or has permeated the organisation, and thus provide an insight into its perceived acceptance, sustainability and contemporary relevance. Using

internal stakeholders (predominantly staff) in this way provides an additional degree of legitimacy to the results beyond that which could be attained by the external researchers.

Structured interviews will then be used to enable primary FCTT external stakeholders to contribute their understanding of the Trust's SWOT, risks and strategic goals from their perspective. The FCTT is fully aware of the importance of working in partnership; being Edinburgh/Scotland based and subject to many of the same environmental factors as the Trust, these stakeholders can comment on the Business Plan's key sections with important insight. It is also likely that some of the Trust's goals will coincide with the objectives of their partners, while new risks may also be identified during this phase of the research. As with the use of internal stakeholders, consultation with FCTT partners lends an additional element of validity to the work. It may not be common for the Trust to consult its partners in this systematic way.

Benchmarking against venues in other cities is also possible along similar lines to those described above – it is anticipated that three locations will be approached. An important element of the rationale behind this approach is to see whether the FCTT stands out from these benchmark locations. It is possible, for example, that the institutional context in Edinburgh contains risks that are not present in other locations: the FCTT therefore has the opportunity to present a case for overcoming unique risks in order to achieve its goals. This may require the injection of additional funds, or political commitment to complete major infrastructure investment.

It is not the place of this research to generate additional goals for the Trust. However, a greater understanding of its structural configuration, organisational field, SWOT, risks and goals will establish the validity of existing goals and the potential future strategic directions for the organisation.

Conclusion

The Festival and King's Theatres are vital to the success of the Edinburgh International Festival, hosting drama, dance and opera on a regular basis. The King's is home to the city's highest profile pantomime every winter and presents the work of many touring productions that otherwise would likely miss Edinburgh out altogether. Both institutions are recognised and cherished elements of the city's artistic and festival institutional infrastructure. Their management structure is discussed in the PMP report, which recognises that the 'not-for-profit trust sector does provide a focus on cultural delivery' (and beneficial tax arrangements), yet perhaps lacks the "harder-edged" delivery' that the private sector can deliver (PMP, 2009:150).

There is much strength to the organisation's strategic position, however it is instructive to note the objectives that the Trust has set itself as well as some risks that may jeopardise their achievement:

- Goal 1: Develop our creative ambitions by continuing to invest in our artistic programme
- Goal 2: Improve our business effectiveness and capability in order to maintain financial stability, promote long-term sustainability and underpin the economic viability of our business
- Goal 3: Increase the size, range and reach of our audiences by entertaining, educating and engaging with them

- Goal 4: Maintain and improve our physical assets and our buildings so that they are accessible, comfortable, safe and inviting
- Goal 5: Establish an industry leadership role for the Trust and its venues as Scotland's National Performing Arts Centre, empowered by public investment

(FCTT, 2009:18-32)

In their scope these goals demonstrate the need to address all aspects of the business in order to prevail in any one area – after all, audience development is likely to be hampered if the venues are not accessible and inviting and the programme lacks sufficient appeal. The PMP report commends the Festival Theatre in a number of areas affecting these goals, such as the décor of the entrance, performance and backstage areas (PMP, 2009:51-53). The King's Theatre was not afforded such compliments, although 'with improved facilities the King's has the potential to further develop its programme and operate over additional weeks of the year' (PMP, 2009:63). With respect to this report, the goals above provide a context in which further research and analysis will contribute to attaining the settled ambitions of the Trust.

This research sets out to assess the Trust's current strengths and resources and outline future development opportunities, with the potential to contribute most meaningfully to Goal 5 as set out above. There is the potential for this work to also play an important part in justifying the present and potential future roles of the Trust within the cultural infrastructure of Edinburgh and Scotland; the Trust needs to consolidate its control over its own destiny and this report can play a part in that process in the short to medium term. This research will then seek to present an opportunity to draw conclusions with relevance beyond the local study and thus will seek to:

- evaluate the circumstances faced by a major festival venue operator as perceived by its key stakeholders
- discuss the implications of these perceptions on the organisation's future growth and development
- compare the organisation's developmental trajectory to those of festival linked venue operators of similar standing in the UK and overseas

It will not explicitly set out to present a justification for public sector investment in the arts, nor an economic impact assessment of the Festival City Theatre Trust's work. Still less is this an opportunity to promote a vision of a particular strand of programming such that it might help the organisation reach its goals. Instead, employing a case study methodology will allow the in-depth analysis of the venues' perceived structural and environmental circumstances and a holistic consideration of the strategic options available in the light of benchmarking data from the other institutions and locations studied. The results will reveal the nature of stakeholders' assumptions and the variety of approaches evidenced in the broader institutional environment of the Trust.

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