

Chapter 4

Event Studies: Progression and Future in the Field



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Abstract Interest in events is unquestionably at an all-time high, fueled by the profile of major cultural, religious and sporting occasions that are subject to increased commodification and, consequently, growing media coverage. Capitalising on this interest, event studies has emerged in recent decades as the new kid on the block, an addition to the leisure, tourism and hospitality fields of study. The growth path of event studies has been documented in a number of reviews and summations of the extant literature (Harris et al. 2001; Getz 2000, 2008, 2010, 2012; Kim et al. 2013; Lee and Back 2005; Mair 2012; Mair and Whitford 2013; Yoo and Weber 2005). These reviews, whilst invaluable in identifying the scope of event studies and gaps in current knowledge, have yet to be explored in relation to their contribution to future event studies and education. With greater freedom to test the waters compared to an empirical paper, this conceptual piece provides an opportunity for some much needed critical introspection (Thomas and Bowdin 2012) as to progress in the field.

Keywords Events · Future · Critical studies · Events education

Introduction

Spurred by unprecedented global growth in events and global media coverage, event studies has increasingly become a popular field of study. Since its introduction as a field of study in the mid-2000s, owing to its conceptualisation by Getz (2008) as the study of planned events, event studies has undergone a decade of rapid growth in exploration and understanding. As a result of its relative youth compared to other related areas of study such as tourism and leisure, the interest in and growth of event studies heralds a promising era. However, as interest increases, so does the need for more holistic and critical examinations of the functions and legacies of planned events and their impact on events education. A number of publications have

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summed and reviewed the extant literature in event studies (Harris et al. 2001; Getz 2000, 2008, 2010, 2012; Kim et al. 2013; Lee and Back 2005; Mair 2012; Mair and Whitford 2013; Yoo and Weber 2005), identifying scope and gaps in relation to the field. However, far fewer have cast a critical eye on this literature to progress the future of this field (Baum et al. 2013), especially not in relation to their implications for future studies and education.

This chapter discusses some of the key developments within the event studies field over the past 5 years, discussing thematic foci and areas of growth. It will draw upon the most recent reviews of the area, environmental scans and other secondary data in forming an informative overview of event studies thus far.

Developments in Event Studies

Since its development as an area of study in the early 2000s, the surge of popularity enjoyed by events studies has been noticeable. Owing to Getz's (2007) seminal work, education in this area has taken on three key forms. Forming the basis of this trio is event design and production, primarily concerned with applied, practical knowledge. This is followed by event management, which incorporates the concerns of event design and production while also encompassing the broader perspectives of experience and cohesion. At the pinnacle of these three levels is event studies, which Getz considers to be the highest level of event education, and concerned with theoretical and conceptual discourses incorporating social, cultural, environmental and economic phenomena.

While this rapid growth suggests event studies is on a similar trajectory to the expansion of tourism research and education during the 1980s and 1990s (Getz and Page 2016), it is helped by the everyday relatability of events to the general populace. Events are, by their nature, short-term. They generally make use of existing infrastructure, and are often boosted by temporary, purpose-built structures. With planned events forming an increasingly frequent part of everyday life while utilising public space and structures, the importance of proper management is emphasised. This familiarity and emphasis on effective management has facilitated bridging of the gap between applied event knowledge and event studies. Nevertheless, event studies and its more applied counterparts suffer from less savoury outcomes regarding their youth: the lack of acceptance as a recognised field of study (Baum et al. 2013).

The study of planned events initially grew with impact assessments relating to economics and finance (Kim et al. 2013). These facilitated interest in the organisational aspects of event management, encouraging studies to extend beyond examining financial impact to exploration into marketing, operations, trends and forecasts (Park and Park 2016). Later on, the focus shifted to examine attendees and their experiences, particularly in the areas of motivation, expectations, satisfaction and other behavioural and experiential dimensions (Kim et al. 2013).

The increased academic interest in the area is evidenced by the growth of event related publications. Not only are there an increased number of event-related journals publishing a greater number of articles, so too, are the number of events-related articles published in leisure, sport and tourism journals (Park and Park 2016). In their thematic analysis of event management research published between 1998 and 2013, Park and Park (2017) found several themes that dominated the field in both events and tourism journals. Destination, management and marketing themes were the focus of an overwhelming majority of these publications, totalling nearly 70% of all publications in their sample. The total number of event publications in selected journals also rose from 150 in the 5-year period between 1998 and 2003 to 337 papers between 2008 and 2013 (Park and Park 2017).

With increased interest and an ever-broadening range of topics within the area to be explored, the remainder of this chapter will eschew detailed discussion of established topics in favour of developing topics within the event studies field that may address previous research gaps and also provide an agenda for future study. This discussion will include the aspects of event studies that are garnering increasing interest, the growth in critical event studies in response to early positive claims, and theoretical developments that may contribute to its status as a field of its own standing.

Situating Event Studies

The instrumentality of events has always been a focus for research in this area (Kim et al. 2013). These have usually involved discussion of the roles events play in destination marketing (Knott et al. 2017; Sant et al. 2013; Werner et al. 2016), providing memorable experiences (Beard and Russ 2017) and its impacts (Michellini et al. 2017; Testa and Metter 2017). These continue to be discussed within the events literature as a broader range of events become subjects for study. Other areas have also gained prominence, extending the breadth and depth of event studies.

In particular, an area that has attracted particular researcher attention in recent years has been the study of sport and mega-events. As established mega-events such as the Summer and Winter Olympic Games continue to attract live spectators and home viewers alike, the significance and impacts of such events have come under increasing scrutiny (Sant et al. 2013). While such mega-events were once considered a prestige for host cities, the pursuit of one-upmanship is increasing the onus on host cities to provide ever more unique experiences, which has resulted in greater criticism of mega-events as a significant waste of resources. This has led to community action blocking cities' bids for sporting mega-events, such as in the case of Hamburg and its withdrawal from the 2024 Olympic host bid, and merely two candidate cities left in contention for hosting the 2024 and 2028 Olympic Games (Bender 2017). In response to this scrutiny, researchers have explored other means of assessing event impacts as justification. Amongst these justifications is the leveraging of events, positioning such events as seed capital that can be used to support and develop longer-term initiatives for the benefit of host cities and countries (Smith 2014). Indeed, event leveraging has

moved beyond initial frameworks encompassing event visitation, trade and media impacts (Chalip 2004) to broader model encompassing social benefits (Chalip 2006; O'Brien and Chalip 2007).

One of the means by which mega-events can be justified and leveraged are through their legacies. Legacies are what events leave behind for the longer term, beyond the event itself, and these have become central to the bidding process for mega events (Leopkey and Parent 2017). This trend has been acknowledged in a number of research publications examining different aspects of legacy, including typologies and key definitions (Dickson et al. 2011; Preuss 2007). These have ranged from examining legacy delivery outcomes, to ensuring equal distribution of benefits from hosting (Lienhard and Preuss 2014; Parent and Smith-Swan 2013). Beyond description of legacies, other researchers have extended studies into the mechanisms and governance systems essential to generate effective event legacies, an area which has been rightly criticised as insufficiently developed in relation to the scale of mega-events (Lockstone-Binney et al. 2016; Smith 2014).

This focus on legacies is also related to another area which has received greater attention in recent years—event sustainability. As a result of this focus on sustainability, local communities and other event stakeholders' perceptions and evaluations of events have been more thoroughly explored (Holmes et al. 2015). Because planned events are often situated in spaces within or adjacent to existing communities, greater emphasis than ever before has been placed on environmental sustainability (Heck and Terret 2016). Aside from the physical environment, socio-cultural elements of sustainability have also gained prominence (Holmes et al. 2015). Consequently, stakeholders' perspectives are taken into greater consideration in the research pertaining to events (Hanrahan and Maguire 2016). In particular, the social sustainability principles of access and inclusion has seen a rise in examinations of volunteering in the event context. Studies such as those from Lockstone-Binney et al. (2016) and Kim and Cuskelly (2017) examine not just the importance of volunteering as essential to events, but also their legacies. The legacies left in events' wakes include host communities' sense of inclusivity and transferable skills learnt from event volunteering experiences (Holmes et al. 2015). Legacy-related studies have also prompted the development of a major events assessment framework, which remains descriptive and procedural in its current iteration (Sadd et al. 2017).

With smartphones and internet access becoming ubiquitous around the world, the role of technology in events has not been neglected. While technology may be used to help attendees co-create their event experiences, it may also change the means by which attendees experience events (Robertson et al. 2015). Currently, the domination of social media as a marketing tool has enhanced event awareness and participation, but can also be flipped to become a tool for event and festival organisers to enhance their suite of services with attendees' social media posts (Pasanen and Konu 2016). Other, more futuristic, means may include concepts such as wearable technology, virtual reality enhancements, visual and physiological enhancement, and personalised content (Robertson et al. 2015). The use of technology is not merely restricted to that of attendees' experience; it has also been proposed as a tool for education institutions to train future event managers (Fotiadis and Sigala 2015).

Such education tools are intended to provide students with a simulated experience assuming the responsibilities as event managers, barring opportunities to work in the industry. This focus on practical skills has also been highlighted in terms of the body of scholarship relating to event management education. While higher education event management courses represent a mix of practical and theoretical knowledge, the industry that employs event management graduates have often expressed preference for those who possess practical experience relating to particular types of event (Ryan 2016). This has led event educators to consciously incorporate industry contact and elements into their design of events management curriculum (Robertson et al. 2012). Such initiatives have taken the form of industry immersion or internships, incorporation of industry speakers into lecture sessions, engagement with event industry associations, and development of technical skills, especially in software commonly used by practitioners (Robertson et al. 2012). The incorporation of industry players into events education serves multiple purposes: allowing industry input into how future employees are educated, providing students with an idea of what is required of them in the industry, while serving as a stage for the most up-to-date industry knowledge to be impressed upon students (Junek et al. 2009).

Event management education has also been supported by the publication of books aimed at different qualification levels and focused on different aspects of event studies. Those that are more industry-focused were presented in the form of guides to terminology and market segmentation (Page and Connell 2012; Schwägermann et al. 2016). There are also others that present in-depth information on particular typologies or aspects of events, such as managing sport events (Greenwell et al. 2014), winning events from a venue perspective (Davidson and Hade 2014), sustainable event management (Jones and Jones 2014) and events sponsorship (McDonnell and Moir 2013).

Previous Criticism

Two key criticisms of event studies that have persisted throughout its surge in popularity have been the lack of theoretical standing and critical examination (Baum et al. 2013; Kim et al. 2013). It is timely to re-examine these criticisms in light of the number of book and journal publications in this area since Baum et al.'s last critical review.

The development of basic theories grounded in the event experience have yet to eventuate, despite cognisance that such development would be instrumental in cementing event studies's status as a disciplinary field (Baum et al. 2013; Getz 2000; Getz and Page 2016). This lack of development, however, has not been for want of trying. While no basic theories have yet to gain precedence, researchers have developed frameworks that could lay the foundation for future theories. Notably, Holmes and Ali-Knight (2017) have developed an event and festival life cycle model based on Butler's (1980) Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC). Holmes and Ali-Knight's model extends the TALC to the temporal context of festival and events to provide a template

for evaluating the failings and future developments of events. While potentially useful for event managers as a framework for identification of development, it remains empirically untested (Holmes and Ali-Knight 2017).

Getz (2012) conceptualised a framework for types and functions of planned events based on convergence and exchange theories, on the basis that all planned events are predicated on some form of exchange—economic, social, cultural or familial. He made use of personal and symbolic dimensions to ascribe the value of meanings in events, while convergence within the framework signified levels of personal participation; this model also remains empirically untested.

Therefore even as event studies advance towards event-specific theory development, the existing frameworks are small steps towards this goal. Perhaps in referencing the related field of hospitality, which has seen a largely fruitless 30-year search for theoretical development (Baum et al. 2013), the field of event studies may yet have a long wait to achieve this goal.

Another key critique of event studies has been its lack of critical examination, particularly in the early stages of its ascent as a field of study (Baum et al. 2013). It is evident from Park and Park (2016), who evaluated the topic trends of event management research from 1998 to 2013, that instrumentality dominates the study of events. Often, such studies are concerned with the immediate value of events to its allied sectors (Baum et al. 2013; Getz 2012), rather than the study of event's intrinsic value. In addition, much of this instrumentality has been viewed positively, without sufficient reflection and critical study (Rojek 2014). Recent publications in the field have, however, indicated the rise of critical event studies. It follows the urgings of Tribe (2008) to resist the positivist agenda in tourism by engaging in critical research to set an agenda for ethical management, governance and co-existence with the wider world.

At least two books have been published recently in the area of critical event studies. While Lamond and Platt (2016) edited a collection of research studies applying critical approaches to various types of planned events, Spracklen and Lamond (2016) adopt a conceptual exploration of criticality in events, discussing various forms of critical study in relation to events. The timeliness of critical event studies is also exemplified by an upcoming special issue in *Events Management Journal*, which received abstract submissions from researchers covering a diversity of topics within event management, and spread across a wide geographical area. The interest in this area is a direction that promises growth, challenging the established positivism in the field. It also signifies a move towards creating evaluation and governance structures that will be better equipped to advocate for ethical practices in event management.

Conclusion

In light of global growth in events, event managers have to create ever more enticing experiences to remain both relevant and competitive. In this chapter, we reviewed the current research foci in the field of events, identifying the areas that are widely explored and those that could bear greater scrutiny. This review contributes to understanding of the current landscape in regard to event studies, which has implications for the future of events education.

As technology becomes increasingly embedded within the event experience (Pasanen and Konu 2016), it creates a feedback loop that informs greater expectations for event attendees while allowing event managers to create more relevant events through attendees' interactions with event technologies. It underscores the importance of incorporating technological aids into events education, so as to become comfortable with technological advancements while encouraging innovation. While theoretical competence is encouraged, as with any field of higher education, the need for practical experience is expected from both employers and students. Hence, the integration of practical, hands-on experiences must constitute an important part of events education.

This chapter also emphasised the importance of sustainability, vis-à-vis legacies and other temporally extended frames of impact that must be considered for future events. In light of criticisms of the functions and resource use of mega-events, consideration of sustainability has never been more important. Events education must therefore take into account these concerns while striking a balance with innovation that would ensure positive relationships between planned events and their stakeholders, especially host communities. As the spotlight turns to sustainability, so too, must the knowledge event educators impart to students, who will be the future leaders of the industry. The continued development of critical event studies will provide the knowledge base to advance this cause, while events education must complement it with encouragement for students to become critical practitioners.

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