Abstract

Purpose – This paper charts the changing use of festivals and events in Europe, from a primary motivation of establishing political power via spectacle to creating and managing a modern image and brand to encourage investment and development with branded cities and accompanying festivals. And what will be the future motivation? What we then interrogate is how events such as the European Capital of Culture then expose issues of authenticity and authorship – who owns the brand and defines that image?

Design/methodology/approach - Review and research of secondary resources comprised most of the content for the research design for this paper.

Research limitation/implications - We see ‘imagined community’ as part of what explains why some local communities exploit the accessibility of events to reassert their ‘ownership’ of the brand by reviving traditions through small, grassroots events. We include theoretical models that emphasise democracy and the building of social capital and involvement as a central vehicle, thereby de-emphasising imposed economic objectives. We offer a vision of the future.

Keywords – festivals and events, brand, motivation, authenticity, community, social capital

Introduction

Festivals and events have always been with us. Goldblatt (2008) notes the Latin routes of events being e-venire or ‘outcome’ and, indeed, one of the themes of this paper is how the outcome of events has flexed over many years with festivals now frequently being used less as a tool for economic development or social cohesion and more as a communal contribution to the human need for community – physical, virtual and in particular, imagined.

This paper charts the changing use of festivals and events in Europe, from a primary motivation of establishing political power via spectacle to creating and managing a modern image and brand to encourage investment and development with branded cities and accompanying festivals. What we then interrogate is how events such as the European Capital of Culture then expose issues of authenticity and authorship – who owns the brand and defines that image? We see ‘imagined community’ as part of what explains why some local communities exploit the accessibility of events to reassert their ‘ownership’ of the brand by reviving traditions through small, grassroots events. We include theoretical models that emphasise democracy and the building of social capital and involvement as a central vehicle, thereby de-emphasising imposed economic objectives. We propose a couple of areas for further research into festivals, branded cities and imagined community. We give a clear example of citizens creating their own branded community. We should expect this. This is the future. For spectacles are symbolic representations of the nature of power and its functioning.

A Brief History of festivals

Bowdin et al (2011, p. 5) gives a definition of festivals as ‘Traditionally a time of celebration, relaxation and recuperation which often follow a period of hard physical labour, sowing or harvesting of crops, for example. The essential feature of these festivals was the celebration or reaffirmation of community or culture. The artistic content of such events was variable and many had a religious or ritualistic aspect, but music, dance and drama were important features of the celebration.’ Getz (1997, p. 4) tells us that an event is ‘an opportunity for an experience outside the normal range of choices or
beyond everyday experience’ and Derrett (2000) notes their celebratory and festive ambience elevates them above ordinary life.

Festivals date back many centuries and the embodiment of these have changed over the years (Quinn 2009) from agrarian roots (Rolfe, 1992) to religious festivals in the Middle Ages (Fox Gotham (2005a) to public displays and civic ritual in Renaissance times (Muir, 1997) through to imperial and international exhibitions in more modern times (Geppert, 2004). Jago et al (2003) note the first Olympic Games were held in 776 BC.

In the seminal text, *Europa Triumphans*, which gives a significant account of early modern court and civic festivals in Europe, Watanabe-O’Kelly (2004) describes the extensive use of festivals and events. She uses the surviving ‘festival books’ which are the official printed account of the festival produced by the body which commissioned the festival itself. Counter intuitively, rather than being a grandstanding opportunity for those in control, ‘festivals were not put on in general to express the self-confidence of rulers or cities with a secure power base, but rather to counter feelings of instability and political upheaval, to assert power or control over a certain group or city of win their allegiance’ (Watanabe-O’Kelly, 2004, p. 5).

Indeed, long-lived rulers, who were firmly enshrined on the throne, or cities who did not suffer political or commercial unease, ‘did not see the need to spend huge sums of money’ with Louis XIV of France a good example because, after a certain point in his reign, he no longer staged great public court festivals ‘because he no longer needed to’ (Watanabe-O’Kelly, 2004, p. 5). Indeed, it seems to her that ‘festivals are usually staged early in the history of a dynasty or reign, and that the more insecure the power of a monarch or city, the more grandiose the festival’ (Watanabe-O’Kelly, 2004, p. 5). Spectacles are theatrical events, frequently including fireworks, where members of the court were often the actors as well as audience. We focus on them as the precursors of modern day branded cities and corporate and community festivals. The context in the past as is true today is that these spectacles were ‘symbolic representations of the nature of power and its functioning’ (Watanabe-O’Kelly, 2004, p. 6).

More recent, industrial times include world fair or expositions and their legacies today (Chalkley and Essex 1999), such as the first ‘Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations’ at Crystal Palace in London in 1851; the Eiffel Tower from the Paris Exhibition of 1889 – which attracted over 30 million visitors; and the British Empire Exhibition 1924-5, which gave us the recently demolished Wembley Stadium and most recently the 1951 Festival of Britain giving us the Royal Festival Hall, and the turn of the millennium celebrations and spectacles which have given London the modern Ferris Wheel, the London Eye.

Some events can now be considered brands in their own right, including the Edinburgh Festival, the Cannes Film Festival, Notting Hill Carnival and the European Capital of Culture.

**City Development, Image Building and Festivals**

Turner (1982, in Quinn, 2009, p. 5) states that people in all cultures recognise the need to set aside certain times and spaces for communal creativity and celebration. Festivals such as those listed above had the dual function of developing the city or region economically and hosting this need to set aside time and space to celebrate.

The Greek Culture Minister in 1984 proposed the original of the European City (now Capital) of Culture and in the following year Athens was selected. According to Evans this is a ‘conduit for the branding of the “Europe Project”’ (2003, p. 426). Spain’s ‘big year’ was 1992 with the Olympics in Barcelona, Madrid as European City of Culture and the EXPO in Seville. Indeed, Barcelona has made a unique contribution to events over many years, which may be ascribed to its function as the capital of Catalonia. Staging spectacles enhances Catalan identity and prestige. The concept has now been adopted overseas where the first ‘Cultural City of the Americas’ was Merida, capital of Yucatan province, Mexico in 2000 (Evans, 2003).

Bauman (2000, p. 98) argues a city hosting a festival is ‘the same city transformed’ while Chalkley and Essex (1999, p. 369) note the increased use of events to enable ‘fast-track urban regeneration, a stimulus to economic growth, improved transport and cultural facilities, and enhanced global recognition and prestige.’

Richards and Wilson (2004, p. 1931) reference the work of Paddison (1993) who observed that ‘signature buildings frequently feature in urban strategies to develop an image or ‘brand’ and create competitive advantage, often at great financial cost’ such as the now iconic, Bilbao Guggenheim, Tate Modern in London and Baltic Flour Mills in Gateshead. Given the inherent cost and inflexibility of
such approaches, spectacles are preferred. This is not new: the 1859 Handel Centenary Festival at Crystal Palace in London was actively marketed as a tourist attraction with 50,000 prospectuses distributed to European railway companies.

Carnegie and McCabe (2008) suggest that whatever the aims for organisers of festivals and events for local audiences, a significant part of decision-making is to attract external visitors. Events can create a demand in time that might be regarded as off-season (Saayman and Saayman, 2006, p. 571). Robertson and Wardrop (2004) argue that festivals and events are pivotal in acquiring the investment needed for restructuring and regeneration.

Festivals and branding
Kavaratzis (2005) traces the journey from place promotion, to place marketing and now to place branding with the success of product branding and the advent of corporate branding. He explains that ‘places are very complex and varied brands, serving varied aims and targeting varied groups and individuals at the same time, which makes them much more difficult to control than conventional product brands’ (Kavaratzis, 2005, p. 334).

Once the brand potential of the event is understood from a consumer perspective, it might be used to link the brand image of an event to the destination’s brand in order to increase potential visitors’ awareness of the destination and/or to enhance or change the image they have of the destination (Jago et al., 2003, p. 5). That image must be based in truth so that a place can deliver on the brand promise as indicated in Figure 1. By capturing and integrating consumers’ images of an event into the destination’s brand this creates a form of co-branding (Rao and Ruekert, 1994; Simonin and Ruth, 1998; Washburn et al., 2000).

Figure 1. Hankinson’s (2004) Brand Model

Done well branding can deliver a lasting legacy for the locality creating a brand that is ‘aspirational and inspirational, able to capture hearts and minds’ (Gilmore, 2002, p. 286). Jun and Lee (2008, p. 152) go further ‘it is recommended that government officials host mega-sports events or expos to build more favourable brand attitudes from international visitors or spectators’. A brand is an investment in marketing communications, with the aim of increasing customer loyalty and what is being termed customer equity (Kotler and Armstrong 2004).

This approach to branding cities and festivals draws on the fact that businesses have been able to create long term relationships with consumers engaged in a search for meaning, identification and belonging through buying and developing a relationship with their brands (Gruen et al., 2000;
These relationships are seen to be broader than just commercial in that the community provides ‘intellectual and social support through experiences of learning, social activism and fellowship (Algesheimer et al., 2005, p.19).

Brands are not merely investments in marketing communications (Anderson and Schoening 1996: p. 215). They are ‘collective symbols and interpretations’ and therefore ‘resources for lives to be lived’. Brands are modern signs and Buber noted in 1938 that ‘Signs happen to us incessantly, to live means to be addressed’ (1965/1938, p. 220). Hirschman concludes her discussion of the era of constructed innovativeness noting that ‘brand managers and marketing theories alike would do well to recognize that the concept of branding originated not with capitalism and the industrial revolution, but rather with the evolutionary human need for communicating group identity (2010, p.454).

**Brand meanings and festivals**

We can infer from this need for group identity that a brand is not simply an investment because the customer uses the brand to create equity and therefore it is also a cultural resource to consumers. This is due to inherent shared social meanings in brands within current consumer culture ‘Communication is the human activity … at the heart of meaning-making activities [and] … because of its meaning-making and organizing functions, plays a unique role in building brand relationships’ (Duncan and Moriarty, 1998, p.2).

O’Guinn and Muniz (2005) ‘Community endures and finds at its center the things most cherished by its members – institutions, political causes, religious affiliations, even brands” (p. 265-6). A paper which does directly address the ineffable is by Schouten et al (2007) and it is noteworthy that it has not resulted in a slew of articles developing transcendent consumer experiences (TCEs). This gap could usefully be filled by further research into festivals as TCEs – a suggestion we repeat in concluding this paper. They locate transcendence in the extraordinary, and build on Arnould and Price’s seminal work on white water rafting (1993) and find that there is huge potential for marketer facilitated TCEs. We see another application of this in celebratory events and festivals. To support this from theory we draw attention to the salience of the top of the Maslow pyramid in advanced economies (1943). Once a culture has met the lower needs at the base of the triangle – for food and shelter, for sociability and success, for significance then what remains to be met is the desire for transcendence. This is a foundation for focusing on marketing the transcendent through festivals.

**Locus of control – shared ownership of brands**

Since brands are increasingly a cultural location for co-creation of meaning between firms and consumers, then control is no longer with the firm. Brands are less products or services, less wholly owned firm assets, more symbols available for individuals to appropriate in constructing their selves “from a kaleidoscope of social meanings that define the ‘who’ I can be … [using] the resources of culture and society” (Anderson and Schoening, 1996, p. 214). Holt understood 15 years ago that consumption focused on brands and today it is still worth stating that active consumers will use these brands in their self-identification and group identification processes. In a consumer culture, this quest for personal meaning has tended to become inseparably linked to brands, (Fournier, 1998; Halliday and Kuenzel, 2008; Holt, 1995; McAlexander et al., 2002).

This then links on to the reference that Cova and Dalli make to the importance of social bonds created by brands. For them, brands underpin experiential marketing and this links back to our earlier discussions of the active, knowledgeable, creative consumers. They see consumers as ‘active agents in the creation of …linking value’ (2010 p.17). ‘ Toast – the story of a boy’s hunger’, Nigel Slater’s autobiography of life in suburban England in the nineteen sixties and seventies (2003) is a record of what the celebrity chef ate as a child: it is noticeable that nearly all the goods are branded. These brands were then tightly linked to a product and were considered to be social superiors of unbranded products. The manufacturers had control of Cadburys mini-rolls, of Bird’s custard powder, of Bisto gravy granules of Heinz sponge pudding. Since then the supermarkets created store wide brands and now the meanings of brands are shared and control has been further ceded to the end users not just the retailers.

‘Dialogue is no longer being controlled by corporations. Individual consumers can address and learn about businesses either on their own or through the collective knowledge of other customers. Consumers can now initiate dialogue’ (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2002, p.2).
This loss of control in the virtual world applies to the world of corporate festivals. Evans (2003) questions whether the strategy of arts and entertainment branded urban regeneration has paid off considering the failures and redundant sites of some post-event locations. His challenge to this ‘blind faith approach’ (Evans, 2003, p. 419) is at odds with the ‘city of renewal’ concept driven by hallmark events and espoused by Hall (1992). He goes on to challenge the practicality and longevity of branding cities, and give the example of associating places with cultural icons such as Mackintosh’s Glasgow, Gaudi’s Barcelona, and Guggenheim’s Bilbao. In the case of Glasgow he notes the ubiquity of Mackintosh-led designs used by organisations reaching its peak in 1999 (nine after the European Capital of Culture in 1990) after which the process of turning away from the association began in search of more forward-looking identities.

**Imagined communities and community**

Imagined communities take place in the human mind. What enables human community is the ‘exchange of meaning in a community of minds motivated to transform reality together’ (Trevathan, 1990, p.689). Being in community, be it imagined, virtual or in physical space and time, contributes to human well-being. For humans to be fully human Buber, a Hasidic Jew writes that a wholly satisfying answer can only be found when one meets another, without using ‘the other’ as an instrument for self-fulfillment (1937). Ruskin wrote presciently on the need for a link between capitalism and moral virtue: he saw merchants (and we can substitute both business managers and marketers here with no loss of sense) as leaders of well-being. Hill (2009) reminds us of Ruskin’s most famous saying: ‘that country is the richest which nourishes the greatest number of noble and happy human beings; that man is richest who, having perfected the functions of his own life, has also the widest helpful influence … by means of their possession over the lives of others’ (Ruskin, 1862). This fits well into the latest UK government statements about needing to measure well-being not just financial GDP. The New Economic Foundation in the UK published a paper to provide detailed support for such an idea (Well-being Manifesto, 2004). They link economics (real wealth means well-being), environment (lifestyles must become sustainable) and society (communities need power and influence).

Community, then, is an aspect of humanity that both embodies yearnings for meaning and transcendence and has a role in gelling society – hence our focus on building social capital later in this paper. Augustine wrote of the ‘universal community as a communion with the sacred’ (Augustine, 397/1991); in Islam the umma also transcends immediate context and geography (Al Bayati, 1983). Is community longed for? Yes. Life without community is experienced by weak and strong alike as ‘often dissatisfying and on occasion, frightening’ (Bauman, 2001, p.60). Is there a unitary response that will satisfy this longing? No. For as the contemporary philosopher, John Gray, writes, now ‘we are none of us defined by membership in a single community or form of moral life’ for ‘the power to conceive of ourselves in different ways, to harbour dissonant projects… is integral to our identity as reflective beings’ (Gray, 1993, p. 262-3). So what possibilities for community are current today? The expectation of frequent and intense interaction with the same set of people, in a community is no longer present (Bauman, 2001). Schmalenbach (1922) wrote of groups of the like-minded forming communities, although in the context of sociological discussions of community he chose to frame these as ‘communions’ (see Delanty, 2009, p.30) due to the focus on shared emotional experiences. ‘This approach to community is particularly relevant to an understanding of more fluid and also festive expressions of community’ (pp. 30-31).

**Festivals as imagined communities**

‘Brands are mechanisms that enable a direct valorization (in the form of share prices, for example) of people’s ability to create trust, affect and shared meanings: their ability to create something in common’ (Arvidsson, 2005, p.236). Therefore marketing and branding has a role in this social sphere since the human relational capacity, evident from birth, is what has been used for all forms of community, including the recent emphasis in marketing on brand community:

‘Brand communities and other social aggregations of empowered consumers are not going away. In fact society’s need for trust and security have rarely been more profound. This provides us with heretofore unknown research opportunities. But this requires new thinking and conceptualizations’ (O’Guinn and Muniz, 2005, p. 270).
These communities are to be ‘festively and joyfully consumed’ (Delanty, 2009, p.70) - surely here there is both licence and encouragement to market consumption experiences. Our era of choice rather than overt coercion or fixed status quo gives space for marketers. Here is a space for marketers to contribute to what must be a variety of responses to this longing for community. This is a place for the marketer to respond to demand.

Muller (2002) argues that ‘if capitalism tends to undermine existing sources of morality, authority, trust and cohesion, it also seems to allow for the creation of new ones’ (p.405). Bauman cites a historian, Jeffrey Weeks in writing that:

‘Demand grows for the ‘identity stories’ in which ‘we tell ourselves about where we came from, what we are now and where we are going’, such stories are urgently needed to restore security, build trust and make meaningful interaction with others possible’ (pp.98-99).

Bauman writes that in all communities ‘all unity needs to be made’ (2001, p.14) (and this frees marketers from worry that the essential artificiality of brand community renders it somehow less worthwhile than other forms of community). Viewed this way, then, communities can be seen as discursively constructed (Delanty, 2009) which again very clearly provided the foundation for marketers constructing brand communities, since brands are part of the marketing communications toolkit and beyond that are part of everyday 21st century life. This may be thin community rather than the thick, traditional and traditioned form, but it is core to what it is to be human, currently. ‘Under the conditions of modernity, the resulting commonality that emerges from discursive communities is often a fragile kind of belonging’ (Delanty, 2009, p. xiii). Boorstin wrote perhaps the first discursive connection in terms of consumer communities in 1974. This kind of belonging in community fits well into a virtual world and explains the success of social networking now that Web 2.0 enables such community construction. Since internet shopping has also been a fast growing phenomenon we also see how online brand communities will flourish in the 21st century. Marketing thought into the future can build on these foundations in what it is to be human, yesterday, today and tomorrow.

**Authenticity, authorship and the citizen**

Academics have been questioning authenticity for some time, with Hobsbawm and Ranger’s seminal work questioning the invention of tradition including ‘the use of ancient materials to construct invented traditions of a novel type for quite novel purposes’ (Hobsbawm, 1983, p. 6). Evans (2003, p. 424) warns of conflict that can be caused by ‘the hegemonic process of selection, choice, re-evaluation and cultural change . . . where city branding and cultural projects reinforce a homogenous culture’ going on to quote Horne (1996) who calls this ‘a fabricated public culture that purports to be the culture not only of the rulers, but of all the people.’ More recently, Gonzalez-Reverte *et al* (2012) explores the issues of authenticity, in the context of Catalan cultural identity, by analysing events in the Costa Brava in Spain.

There is often little sense of collective or social responsibility evident in the contemporary promulgation of festivals in urban areas with events being social constructions that bear heavy signs of authorship (Quinn, 2005, p. 936-7). The narrative of events is also questionable where hallmark events ‘functions like a monument, supporting and reinforcing the image of established power, whether religious or secular’ (Bonnemaison, 1990 in Hall, 1992, p. 89).

There seems consensus on the fact that event organisers are more dependent on the enthusiasm of the local community for their success than they are upon unique natural or built attractions (Janiskee, 1994; Turko and Kelsey, 1992 – in Kim and Uysal, 2003, p. 160). Yet events often provide ‘idealised, sanitised versions of the city where real opportunities for genuine engagement . . remain sidelined’ (Quinn, 2005, p. 936).

**The Democratic? Citizen-powered festivals, brands and communities**

There are many challenges a community faces when an event is held. One is the threat of an organiser who may move the event in another direction when institutional power is transferred (Searle, 1995 in Gursoy *et al*, 2004). Others include the ‘capture’ of culture which could become an ‘infringement of cultural and intellectual property rights’ (Wells, 2006, p. 8) as well as problems with authenticity which ‘diminishes or disappears and problems of overcrowding and commercialism take over especially if . . just for the purpose of . . revenue’ (Gursoy *et al*, 2004, p. 172). Ideally, the event experience should naturally and respectfully showcase local traditions with ‘rituals that may have been
meaningful in the past for an internal public can evolve, under the influence of tourism, to become a culturally-significant self-representation before an external public’ (Cohen, 1988, p. 382).

There have been attempts to measure the social impacts of events with Delamere et al (2001) developing Festival Social Impact Attitude Scale (FSIAS) to measure and interpret residents’ perceptions of the social impacts of community-based festivals; Fredline et al (2003) instrument to assess the social impacts of a variety of medium to large-scale events; and Small and Edwards (2003) Social Impact Perception (SIP) scale designed to measure residents’ perceptions of the social impacts arising from small community festivals. Ekman (1999) observes that local history has grown in importance with the disempowerment of small municipalities in regional Sweden, leading to a revival in traditional regional markets, which were once important parts of both the agricultural and religious calendars, as well as ‘local days’ which celebrate the community, through to special days or weeks dedicated to a famous person from that area.

Aside from celebration, another benefit would be the relative ease with which ordinary members of the public can contribute to events. Getz (1993) observes that as many smaller events are largely volunteer-run and locally controlled they can make substantial returns on small financial investment. Falk and Kilpatrick (2000) note that shared participation in learning activities is one way to enhance social capital with Molloy (2002) proposing volunteer involvement in festivals and events as a form of learning. Moscardo (2007) proposes a framework that puts the community at the centre of involvement (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. A preliminary conceptual framework to understand the role of festivals and events in regional development

While an event may attract large numbers of visitors and generate revenue, if it does not create community involvement it is unlikely to contribute adequately to regional development. The community involvement enhances social capital and community capacity that are the twin components of positive regional development. The framework gives a smaller role to economic benefits and tourism marketing benefits than is traditional in event management literature. In the past it seemed as though the need to demonstrate economic benefit to gain, and maintain, government funding may have changed the nature of events (Moscardo, 2007, p. 29-30).
Conclusion and areas for further research

Arcordia and Whitford (2006) argue that while the reasons for and types of celebrations are culturally bound, the phenomenon of celebration itself is found in all cultures. Consequently, festivals that have a celebratory theme allow people, regardless of culture and status, to participate in an occasion that generates a feeling of goodwill and community of spirit or ‘communitas’. They suggest a model which more explicitly seeks the building of social capital as its primary outcome (see Figure 3). The model could usefully be tested in the area of branded cities, festivals and imagined communities. The desire for TCEs could usefully be incorporated.

Gursoy et al (2004) observe that small events require minimal capital development, can take advantage of existing infrastructure and have the potential for substantial return on small financial investment. Getz (1993, p. 587) states that ‘festivals and special events play a significant role in the lives of communities because they provide important activities and spending outlets for locals and visitors, as well as enhance the image of local communities.’

Citizens can take a multi-faceted approach to influencing their surroundings, with a clear example from Harney (2006: 25) whose research into the Italian community of Toronto highlights their (peaceful) ‘claiming and colonising space’ through what he terms the ‘quotidian shaping of neighbourhoods, the calendrical colonising of public spaces during religious and secular celebrations and the monument building . . . to the permanence of Italians in the city.’ In the era of constructed innovativeness, consumer knowledge and power, of the democratic citizen, this is a clear example of citizens creating their own branded community. We should expect this. This is the future. For spectacles are symbolic representations of the nature of power and its functioning.

Figure 3. Conceptual Model of Festivals and the Development of Social Capital

Source: Arcordia and Whitford (2006, p. 7)
References


