

## Event futures: innovation, creativity and collaboration

### *Introduction*

This special issue has at its centre the theme Event Futures: innovation, creativity and collaboration. This theme was the basis of the Association for Events Management Education (AEME) annual forum hosted at Cardiff Metropolitan University, 5–7 July 2017. Accordingly, it is gratifying to see some of the papers presented at the Forum make their way through the editorial process, to emerge here in published format.

The annual AEME forum and the *International Journal of Event and Festival Management* are communication forms. They have a symbiotic role in the future of events education and research. Events have evolved and changed through time, raising both challenges and opportunities for the practitioner, the educator and the researcher alike. It is through a combination of collaborative activity and forwards thinking that the progress of events will continue to evolve. This special issue offers a record of some of the discussion, debate and vision of that evolution. The contributing papers highlight current and future success in academic and applied contexts.

### **The contributing work**

In the paper “Enlivenment and the Gruffalo; the unfolding story of events in Destination Shopping Centres”, Strafford, Crowther and Schofield utilise a triple staged empirical study to offer greater insight of both the strategic potential of events and the future role of events in destination shopping centres.

Westwood, Schofield and Berridge argue that agricultural shows receive an insufficient level of research and their future requires a far more profound understanding of their relevance to those that currently support them. Their paper, “Agricultural shows: visitation motivation, experience and behavioural intention”, offers an analysis of the results of intercept surveys at four major agricultural shows in the UK. The findings voice an initial step in the identification of motivation and experience dimensions at such events.

With a stated underpinning of multiple inductive processes, Bandi Tanner and Kunzi’s paper engages a theoretical impact model with event evaluation practices to propose an “Event performance index: a holistic valuation tool”. This tool, it argues, has the propensity to make the calculation for government subsidy more rigorous, and aid the sustainable development of events.

In the work by Vlachos and Mueser, “‘Almost like being there?’ A conceptualisation of live-streaming theatre”, the researchers argue for more significant research capacity in the area of Live Streaming Theatre in the UK. The work contributes to our understanding of hybrid and virtual experiences of events and the interplay between complex and potentially competing aims of access and authenticity.

In “Events and the Blue economy: sailing events as alternative pathways for tourism futures – the case of Malta”, Jones and Navarro apply a qualitative and case study inductive approach to enlarge knowledge of the contribution of a sailing event in bringing forward Malta’s capacity to enjoy a blue (maritime tourism) economic driver. Their work augments possible future reasons to continue to do so.

Tjønndal’s paper is a response to a stated lack of work engaged in understanding motives for stakeholder engagement in major sports events. In the context of the 2017 Barents Summer Games, the participant observations of this event contribute to an



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ethnographic fieldwork study exploring potential opportunity to make stakeholders of major sports events more positively innovative, as well as understanding the hindrances for this innovation.

### **Reflection on the papers and theme of this special issue**

The papers underline the continued importance of events concerning policy and practice agendas. Events and their communicative power and social capacity to engage the interest of people are seen as essential drivers, both for retail (Strafford *et al.*) and for tourism (Jones and Navarro; Tjønnedal). In this respect, understanding of motivation needs to be more nuanced than previously witnessed. The limited research about understanding the motivation and experiences of Agricultural events (Westwood *et al.*) is an example of overcoming this lack of nuanced understanding. Towards this, the authors identify the need for further research at other Agricultural events and the value of longitudinal understanding.

The research shared in these papers accentuates the need to understand events and their more comprehensive contribution to economic and societal issues. Jones and Navarro offer a useful case study of the Rolex Middle Sea Race and the destination context of a yachting race. The value of events to tourism destinations as a means of lengthening season, diversification and attracting new markets is not a new idea, but it evidences how creative utilisation of varied destination resources through events reduces dependence on mass tourism. Bandi Tanner and Kunzi's research identifies, in a similar vein, the varying stakeholder perspectives of events. Both papers (Jones and Navarro; Bandi Tanner and Kunzi), recognise the need not to approach events in isolation but to ensure a collaborative manner is sought to bring various stakeholders together. In this way, it is possible to realise the full positive impacts of events and to prolong their sustainability. Bandi Tanner and Kunzi do this through demonstrating an event performance index that brings both economic and societal impacts together in a holistic approach.

All the papers in this special issue recognise the need to use past and existing events to create a perspective for the future. Exploring and further understanding events from a variety of views are vital to inform future research, education and practice. Insightful consideration of the broader implications of the work undertaken is at the heart of knowledge creation and exchange. The impact of technological changes and their opportunities and challenges need particularly careful consideration because they have the potential to have significant long-term implications for the way that events are both experienced and managed. Vlachos and Mueser develop a conceptual model to assist in the way that theatre may be experienced and consumed and question the influence and impact technology may have on other services such as smaller more regional theatre companies.

### **Moving the agenda forward**

In initiating this special issue the guest editors had anticipated work in areas such as event design, advances in technology, the growth and robustness of trend analysis, and the defining role of co-creative activity and crowdsourcing. In 2013, the special issue "Emerging knowledge and innovation in event management" (Lockstone-Binney *et al.*, 2013) commented on the likely increase in four of these areas of knowledge endeavour. Further, they have been apparent in other publications, including issue 1 this year (Jackson *et al.*, 2018; Orefice, 2018). But in reading the valuable inputs here, we realise that the strengths of these papers are the contributory purpose they serve. No work should be read in isolation. To do so would delay progress in the capacity to innovate.

There are many more places for event researchers and academics to share their work and there are external pressures as to where these need be placed (e.g. UK Research Excellence Framework 2021, Excellence in Research in Australia 2018). So it more crucial than ever before

for us to work closely as a community. The recent emergence of the Critical Event Studies “movement” (Spracklen and Lamond, 2016; Lamond and Platt, 2016) is an example of where the subject area is moving forward and a possible showcase for dynamic disruptions and social dislocation to offer an opportunity for counter discussion. The plea here is to encourage our colleagues to support event related publications to further our academic community.

It is envisaged that the papers in this special issue should offer contested space and knowledge creation, and generate an exchange of ideas and other insights for future journal issues or on various social media platforms. There are multiple ontological and epistemological approaches to the world. This is no different in the world within which events and their constituent parts and stakeholders sit. This special issue offers various approaches to conceptualising and researching events. Events are an exciting phenomenon within which to understand issues that are wider than the events themselves and should encourage a review of other contexts. They are a microcosm through which we can explore wider issues. Vlachos and Mueser question the impact of the use of advanced technology to offer a more accessible experience of streamed theatre in local cinemas. The work raises questions for the different formats of consumption and experience that digitisation and technological advances such as augmented, mixed and virtual reality can offer. What is our sense of reality, so what is authentic? What are the consequences and so what should be preserved and conserved from the past?

From these special issue papers we would encourage readers to take away, reflect upon and respond to the following points:

- the power of events to take an environment and shape it for wider impact (Stafford *et al.*; Jones and Navarro);
- the relevance of maintaining and cherishing traditions in events (Westwood *et al.*);
- the harnessing of technological advances to enhance the event experience (Vlachos and Mueser);
- continued reflection on the managerial efficiencies and effectiveness through development of holistic approaches and metrics (Bandi Tanner and Kunzi); and
- the importance of understanding the mixed and sometimes conflicting motives of event stakeholders in the design and delivery of events (Tjønndal).

All of the papers demonstrate the need for continued reflection, critique and challenge. Constant change is not always healthy, but the need to be aware of the change and the best way of achieving this is. Each of the papers demonstrates the need to be collaborative and co-creative in how events run. They highlight the need to understand each of the human elements, whether of the consumer, or the funder, or the host. No longer should an event be foisted upon a community. Instead, it should work with the environment within which it sits (blue, green, brown or grey) and the relevant stakeholders. It is a complex task and one where the event organiser should also be aware of the silent stakeholders, those people and environments that do not have a voice. It is therefore relevant that event researchers and educators should ensure that these are included in what they cover in the future.

The topics that are not covered extensively in this special issue and that we as editors believe should form part of future papers and commentaries include:

- The future form, function and purpose of event experiences.
- The way that those employed and active within the performance and production of events may alter as technological advances offer opportunities and threats.
- The challenge but great optimism afforded by changing environments such as the sharing economy.

- If the true nature of co-creation is realised, how should the loss of traditional power and control be managed? (This may become a contested arena when issues such as security and safety have potential to be challenged).
- The shaping of how education may need to change to continue its contribution to the professional and critical skills and knowledge likely to purposefully enhance success in an unclear future.

It is hoped that the papers included in this issue of the *International Journal of Festival and Event Management* will form (or are forming) part of the event field research agenda. Collectively and collaboratively, we are all responsible for moving the multi-disciplinary events management, and events studies, forward. This special issue contributes to furthering our knowledge and offering a platform for the future. Accordingly we thank the authors and research contributors in supporting that.

**Dewi Jaimangal-Jones**

*Department of Tourism, Hospitality and Events Management,  
Cardiff Metropolitan University, Cardiff, UK*

**Martin Robertson**

*Tourism and Languages Group, Edinburgh Napier University,  
Edinburgh, UK and  
College of Business, Victoria University, Melbourne, Australia, and*

**Caroline Jackson**

*Department of Events and Leisure, Bournemouth University,  
Poole, UK*

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