Socio-cultural impacts of events

Meanings, authorized transgression and social capital

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Introduction: the impacts of events

All events have impacts (Hall 1997). More specifically, all events or, at least, planned events have a purpose or objective and, hence, intended, desired and predicted (and, on occasion, unanticipated) outcomes. These, in turn, have impacts on host communities, participants and other stakeholders who, as Getz (2007: 300) puts it, are ‘impacted’ by the outcomes of events. Such impacts may be positive or beneficial. Indeed, it is the expected benefits of events, whether economic, social, cultural, political or environmental, that is the principal driver underpinning the support for and increasing popularity of them at the local, national and international scale. Of course, the impacts of events may also be negative. That is, events almost inevitably incur costs or have negative consequences that, to a lesser or greater extent, serve to reduce their net benefit. Thus, a key task for event managers is to not only identify and, as far as possible, predict the impacts of events, but to manage them in such a way that benefits are optimized and negative impacts are minimized so that, ‘on balance the overall impact of the event is positive’ (Bowdin et al. 2006: 37).

It is not surprising, therefore, that the academic study of events and event management has long focused upon the impacts or consequences of events. As Quinn (2009: 487) notes, initial research agendas focused on developing knowledge and understanding of the impacts of events: ‘from early on, events came overwhelmingly to be conceived as discrete entities with an ability to unidirectionally create a series of impacts, both positive and negative, on contextual environments’. What is surprising, perhaps, is that until recently a predominantly economic perspective was in evidence (Formica 1998). In other words, despite early recognition of the wide variety of impacts that might be associated with events (Ritchie 1984), much research focused specifically on their economic consequences, a trend noted by others (Hede 2007; Moscardo 2007). Undoubtedly, this reflected the importance that was, and continues to be, placed upon the role of particular events in urban, rural, regional or national (economic) development and, hence, the need to both justify and measure the returns on often significant financial investment in festivals and events as agents of development (Andranovich et al. 2001). In other words, despite their potential to contribute to, for example, the enhancement of a city’s image (Richards and Wilson 2004) or the development of community cohesion and pride
(Waitt 2003), the success of events is often ultimately assessed according to economic criteria such as income generation, employment generation or the attraction of inward investment (Dwyer et al. 2000).

However, two points must immediately be made. First and quite evidently, events are not always promoted or staged for the economic benefits that they might generate, and nor can their negative consequences be measured simply in economic terms. Indeed, events may often be staged at an economic ‘loss’ when, for example, their costs are covered not by income from participants but by sponsorship or local government funding. In such cases, the desired benefits of the event might be overtly socio-cultural: strengthening community identity and pride (De Bres and Davis 2001), developing social capital (Arcodia and Whitford 2006), increasing local participation in community activities (Ritchie 1984), revitalizing local culture, traditions, and so on. Equally, events may be staged for political purposes (Roche 2000). Frequently, the hosting of international mega-events may be driven by the pursuit of international prestige or legitimacy whilst other events may seek to highlight specific political issues or causes, both ‘Live Aid’ and ‘Live 8’ concerts in 1985 and 2005 respectively being notable examples of the latter. Reference should also be made, of course, to the physical or environmental impacts, both positive and negative, of events. As discussed in Chapter 24, not only may events provide an environmental benefit (for example, improved infrastructure), but also there is a pressing need to manage the environmental impacts of events within a sustainability framework.

Second, the impacts of events are neither discrete nor necessarily hierarchical. That is, all events have a variety of impacts, both positive and negative, some being more immediately evident than others, some being of potentially greater significance than the intended outcomes. For example, a study by Lee and Taylor (2005) found that the sense of national pride engendered by the South Korean national team’s success at the 2002 FIFA World Cup hosted by that country far outweighed the event’s economic returns. Similarly, the annual London Marathon has a major economic impact in terms of the money that participants raise for charity whilst, for the runners themselves, taking part in (and, hopefully, completing) the marathon not only provides a sense of achievement but also, as Shipway and Jones (2008) reveal, is linked to social identity formation. However, the publicity surrounding the event may also have a major influence on encouraging people to take up running and, hence, on longer-term health trends.

Together, these points suggest that, in order to fully understand the potential impact of events, there is a need for more broadly focused research that explores beyond the confines of economic analysis. Indeed, there have long been calls for a more expansive approach to researching events. Moreover, it has been suggested that ‘despite the growth and popularity of festivals and special events, researchers have been very slow in directing research beyond economic impacts’ (Gursoy et al. 2004: 171), there is evidence to suggest that, in more recent years, such a broader perspective has come to be adopted. In particular, the study of events has increasingly embraced the identification, measurement and analysis of their social and cultural impacts, whilst a special issue of the journal Event Management in 2008 focused on events ‘beyond economic impacts’. Nevertheless, this research arguably remains limited both in absolute terms and also, as Fredline and Faulkner (2000) observed over a decade ago, relative to related research focusing on the socio-cultural impacts of tourism (see also Fredline et al. 2003). Thus, the purpose of this chapter is to review contemporary approaches to the study of the social and cultural impacts of events and to explore ways in which our knowledge and understanding of such impacts may be enhanced. First, however, it is useful to consider what, in a generic sense, the social and cultural impacts of events ‘are’ and the different dimensions within which they may be considered.
Social and cultural impacts: focus and dimensions

A major challenge facing the study of events in general and of their social and cultural impacts in particular is the sheer volume and diversity of organized activities or occasions that may be described as events. Without repeating the definitional debates addressed elsewhere in this book, this volume and diversity is such that it is difficult and, perhaps, dangerous to generalize about the purpose, management and outcomes of events. Every event is a unique activity, occasion or ‘happening’ with unique objectives and, hence, unique outcomes and impacts. Therefore, it is unsurprising that much research into events is case study-based although, more recently, attempts have been made to develop general frameworks for assessing the social impact of events (Delamere et al. 2001; Fredline et al. 2003; Reid 2008; Small 2008).

Nevertheless, all events share a common characteristic: people. The staging of an event attracts people from elsewhere as participants or spectators; equally, it may only involve local people, again as participants and/or spectators. In either case, however, the event may have impacts on both participants and spectators and on the local (host) community more generally as well as, depending on its nature and scale, on communities further afield or not directly involved with the event. At the same time, people are also involved in events as organizers. They may be members of the local community, local leaders, representatives of particular interest groups or professional event organizers. Importantly, it is the interactions and relationships within and between these different stakeholder groups that may go some way to determining the nature and extent of the social and cultural impacts of events.

But what are these social and cultural impacts? In other words, what do we mean by the terms ‘social’ and ‘cultural’ impacts, and can they be thought of collectively as ‘socio-cultural’ impacts? According to Burdge and Vanclay (1996: 59), social impacts can be defined generally as ‘all social and cultural consequences to human population of any public or private actions that alter the ways in which people live, work, play, relate to one another, organize to meet their needs, and generally cope as members of society’. Conversely, cultural impacts are those which ‘involve changes to the norms, values, and beliefs of individuals that guide and rationalize their cognition of themselves and their society’. Putting it another way, the social impacts of events in particular may be defined as transformations in how people live their lives or, as Wall and Mathieson (2006: 227) suggest, ‘changes in the quality of life’ of local communities, participants and other stakeholders that arise from the holding of an event of any kind. On the other hand, the cultural impacts of events may be thought of as transformations in the processes (values, traditions and norms) through which individuals and societies define themselves and their behaviour (see Richards 2006) although, rather confusingly, the study of the cultural impacts of tourism, with its explicit relevance to event studies, often embraces impacts on expressions or manifestations of culture, such as both material and non-material forms of culture. Thus, the distinction between ‘social’ and ‘cultural’ impacts is not always clear, the potential commoditization of a particular cultural event, for example, arguably being definable as both a social and cultural impact. However, for the purposes of this chapter, social and cultural impacts may be defined respectively as the impacts of an event on the day-to-day life of people associated directly or indirectly with that event and on the values, attitudes, beliefs and traditions that determine or guide that day-to-day life. Moreover, there is an evident relationship between the two and therefore, for the sake of simplicity, they will be considered here collectively as socio-cultural impacts.

The question then to be addressed is: how should the socio-cultural impacts of events be assessed or researched? In other words, what broad perspective (as opposed to prescriptive research frameworks) should be adopted when considering such impacts? From the preceding
discussion of the meaning of the terms ‘social’ and ‘cultural’ impacts, it is evident that there are two levels or dimensions within which they may be studied. First, what are usually referred to as social impacts of events, that is, the more immediate and tangible impacts on local people, participants and others influenced directly by an event, may be considered within a simplistic, deterministic, uni-dimensional ‘cause and effect’ framework. That is, the hosting of events brings about a variety of immediate, identifiable and predictable social consequences which arise from interactions between local people and visitors (in a tourism context, host–guest interactions), from activities and developments related to the event and from the extent of local participation in the event. Such impacts are similar to those associated with the development of tourism more generally, such as the tangible impacts of congestion, crime and anti-social behaviour, as well as broader transformations in the form of cultural commoditization and so on. These are often balanced against the economic consequences of events and which, implicitly, may be managed.

Second, the notion of cultural impacts, or changes to an individual’s or society’s values, norms, beliefs, traditions and so on, suggests that a more complex relationship exists between an event and all its stakeholders, including performers/participants, visitors/spectators, organizers, and local communities, distinctions between whom may not always be evident. That is, whilst in some cases, such as sporting mega-events, each group of stakeholders is distinctive, in other cases, such as small local events, all stakeholders may be members of the local community. This, in turn, suggests that a multi-dimensional approach which not only addresses the immediate causal relationship between the event and stakeholders (the uni-dimensional perspective) but which also recognizes the complex relationships between the event and all stakeholders may provide a deeper and richer basis for exploring the social and cultural impacts of events.

This multi-dimensional process – that is, the socio-cultural transformation arising out of complex event-related social relationships – has been referred to as ‘remaking worlds’ (Picard and Robinson 2006) and embraces themes such as identity creation (personal, cultural, national), ritualized transgression and so on. These will be considered in more detail shortly but, by way of comparison, the next section briefly reviews contemporary approaches to the socio-cultural impacts of events within the context of the uni-dimensional perspective.

**Uni-dimensional perspectives on socio-cultural impacts**

As noted above, research into the impacts of events has, perhaps understandably, adopted a primarily economic focus. For example, at the ‘Events Beyond 2000: Setting the Agenda’ conference in 2000, all papers focusing on ‘event evaluation’ emphasized the importance of economic impacts (Allen et al. 2000). This is not to say, however, that the non-economic impacts of events have gone unrecognized. Ritchie’s (1984) widely cited paper revealed the diversity of forms of impact potentially resulting from, specifically, so-called hallmark events. Indeed, most textbooks on event studies and event management include chapters that explore or describe the impacts of events under a variety of headings, typically economic, socio-cultural, political and physical/environmental. Nevertheless, much of the research into these non-economic impacts remains limited to immediate and tangible consequences of events, often following a descriptive cause-and-effect model; conversely, more in-depth or multi-dimensional studies have, until more recently, been lacking.

This limited approach to non-economic impacts, in particular within the socio-cultural context, may be explained by three factors in particular. First, the study of events is very much concerned with management issues or, more specifically, how to manage events successfully. In other words, the academic study of events is explicitly linked with the practice of event...
management and, thus, much research is driven by the needs of the ‘events industry’; that is, how to manage and respond to the socio-cultural impacts of events in order to optimize desired (and implicitly, measurable) outcomes. As a consequence, longer-term cultural transformations have, arguably, been of less concern (Harris et al. 2000). Second, academic study and research in events has very much evolved from the broader study of tourism. Many ‘events’ researchers are active members of the tourism academic community and are, therefore, aware of the extensive body of knowledge with respect to (tourism’s) socio-cultural impacts, whilst event tourism and event management are often explicitly linked (Backman et al. 1995; Getz 1997). Moreover, much existing impacts literature in tourism refers to events and, thus, to explore the socio-cultural impacts of events may be seen as repeating existing research. Third, and as observed in the previous section, the diversity and scope of events is such that it is difficult, if not impossible, to progress beyond research into case-specific, tangible and measurable impacts of events.

Certainly, these three factors go some way to explaining the contemporary literature on the socio-cultural impacts of events. Textbooks, for example, tend to identify and list the positive and negative socio-cultural impacts of events before proposing management responses and strategies. Typically, these are immediate, tangible impacts caused by events. Negative impacts are those which collectively and negatively impact upon the lives of local communities, such as crowding, rowdy behaviour, traffic congestion, substance abuse, crime and loss of amenity, as well as feelings of community manipulation/commoditization or exclusion (Bowdin et al. 2006). Conversely, positive socio-cultural impacts reflect the commonly cited social objectives of events, such as strengthening community cohesion, engendering community identity and pride, revitalizing cultural traditions or enhancing place meanings to residents.

However, as Boyko (2008: 162) suggests, ‘impacts cannot be viewed in absolute terms of good and bad … [nor] … be regarded entirely in isolation from one another. Rather, the impacts on a host community are intertwined and depend on goals and values … within that community’. For this reason, perhaps, much of the extant research into the socio-cultural impacts of events addresses one of two issues: either resident/host community perceptions of the impacts of particular festivals and events (for example, Jeong and Faulkner 1996; Mihalik and Simonetta 1998; Zhou and Ap 2009), which builds on an extensive literature focusing on resident perceptions of tourism development more generally, or the development of frameworks or scales for identifying and measuring socio-cultural impacts (for example, Delamere et al. 2001; Fredline et al. 2003; Small 2008). The latter approach is of particular note inasmuch as it identifies those impacts of events that fall under the heading of socio-cultural. Delamere et al.’s (2001) study, for example, lists a total of twenty-one social benefits, divided into community benefits and cultural/educational benefits, and twenty-seven costs, separated into quality of life concerns and community resource concerns – a condensed version is provided in Table 23.1. It should be noted that this study focused specifically upon community festivals, where socio-cultural impacts (both positive and negative) may be more widely and keenly sensed than at other types of events. Nevertheless, it demonstrates the more immediate, tangible impacts of events but, whilst revealing the diversity of such impacts that might be experienced by the host community, the principal contribution of this research is to the effective management and planning of events. Consequently, Delamere et al. (2001: 22) suggest,

as community leaders and festival organizers become more aware of the needs and priorities of the community, they can better respond to community concerns and work together to maintain an appropriate balance between the social benefits and social costs that emanate from community festivals.
What is not generally explored in the extant literature is the potential for longer-term cultural transformations within host communities, nor indeed amongst individuals and groups beyond the host community. In other words, although some commentators consider non-host community perceptions of events (Deccio and Baloglu 2002), the perceptions of event organizers (Gursoy et al. 2004) or socio-cultural impacts experienced by participants (Shipway and Jones 2008), the predominant focus of the research on the host community has tended to exclude other dimensions. Therefore, as suggested earlier in this chapter, in order to fully understand the potential socio-cultural impacts of events there is a need for a multi-dimensional approach to research which recognizes the complexity of stakeholder relationships as well as the potential for longer-term, less tangible impacts that may well fall outside the control or influence of event managers and organizers. It is to this multi-dimensional perspective that this chapter now turns.

### Multi-dimensional perspectives on socio-cultural impacts

As discussed in the preceding sections, the scope and diversity of potential socio-cultural impacts of events has long been recognized, as has the need to manage such impacts. However, the consideration of impacts within a somewhat parochial events management context has, arguably, served to focus attention on tangible, manageable impacts. Conversely, relatively few attempts have been made to explore the potential for longer-term socio-cultural transformations and impacts within a broader non-management context; that is, attention has primarily been focused inwardly on the management of events themselves rather than outwards on the world in which events take place. However, as Picard and Robinson (2006: 4) argue, ‘festivals, while containing worlds, also open out and spill over into “outside” worlds and their multiple dimensions can only be understood by taking into consideration the different realities of these outside worlds’.

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**Table 23.1 Socio-cultural impacts of events**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Social benefits</strong></th>
<th><strong>Social costs</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community benefits</td>
<td>Quality of life concerns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebration of community</td>
<td>Increased crime/vandalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhanced community identity</td>
<td>Unacceptable increase in vehicular/pedestrian traffic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhanced community image</td>
<td>Overcrowding</td>
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<tr>
<td>Increased community cohesion</td>
<td>Litter/ecological damage</td>
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<tr>
<td>Increased community well-being</td>
<td>Reduced privacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved quality of community life</td>
<td>Disruption to normal routines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual pride through participation</td>
<td>Unacceptable noise levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared ideas amongst community</td>
<td>Overuse of community facilities</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Cultural/educational benefits</th>
<th>Community resource concerns</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Experience of new activities</td>
<td>Increased disagreement within community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants learn new things</td>
<td>Event is ‘all work no play’</td>
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<tr>
<td>Event showcases new ideas</td>
<td>Excessive demand on community human resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of cultural skills/talents</td>
<td>Highlights cultural stereotypes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposure to new cultural experiences</td>
<td>Unequal sharing of benefits of the event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengthening of community friendships</td>
<td>Weakened community identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lasting positive cultural impact</td>
<td>Excessive demand on community financial resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement of common community goals</td>
<td>Potential sense of failure within community</td>
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Source: adapted from Delamere et al. (2001).
same may be said of events more generally (festivals generally being defined as a specific manifestation of event). As significant as the management imperative might be in order to ensure that desired benefits are achieved, the socio-cultural consequences of events can only be understood fully by relating the analysis to the various ‘realities’ of the world beyond the social, economic, political and environmental confines of the event itself. In short, in order to identify more completely the potential extent of the socio-cultural impacts of events, a multi-dimensional approach is required.

Of course, as with the analysis of the more specific, tangible impacts, it is both difficult and inappropriate to generalize both the broader, perhaps intangible impacts and the realities of the external worlds of events. Not only are events infinitely variable in character and purpose, but also different external realities will be more or less relevant to different events. For example, and as discussed in the case study below, the impacts of explicitly gay and lesbian events, such as Sydney’s Mardi Gras, on participants, spectators, local communities, host places and the meaning of the events themselves (Hughes 2006) are directly related to a dynamic cultural, political (and legal) context with respect to homosexual communities in particular and sexuality more generally. As Markwell (2002: 96) notes,

> just as places and their meanings and interpretations are constructed out of processes that reflect the dynamic, often contested power relations between the social and cultural groups occupying those places, so Mardi Gras continues to emerge from a dynamic mix of contested views and philosophical positions.

Nevertheless, most, if not all, events occur in a world that is, according to Picard and Robinson (2006: 2), characterized by ‘structural change, social mobility and globalisation processes’, referred to more generally by some as globalization (Held and McGrew 2000) and by others as the condition of postmodernity (Harvey 1989). However labelled (a full consideration of these alleged processes is beyond the scope of this chapter, but see Sharpley 2008), these transformations are typically manifested in or, more precisely, bring about, amongst other things, cultural dislocation, a loss of self-identity and a sense of ‘placelessness’ (Relph 1976) or anomie. Therefore, individuals, communities or specific social groups within contemporary societies seek meaning, authenticity and identity; this, in turn, may go some way to explaining the rapid increase in both the number of events being organized and hosted in recent years and their growing popularity amongst visitors (MacLeod 2006). For host communities, events or festivals provide an opportunity to re-assert or re-invent cultural identity where ‘recognised systems of symbolic continuity are challenged by the realities of new social, economic and political environments’ (Picard and Robinson 2006: 2). A widely cited example of this is the city of Glasgow which, through its ‘reign’ as the 1990 European City of Culture, was able to re-invent itself as a post-industrial cultural city (García 2005), though innumerable other places/communities have followed a similar process at a smaller, more local scale. For visitors or tourists – tourism more generally being seen by some as a search for meaning or authenticity (MacCannell 1989; Wang 1999) – festivals and events may be perceived as offering the opportunity for authentic experiences. The extent to which they do so remains the subject of intense debate, yet the ever increasing ‘supply’ of events feeds a growing demand for such experiences.

The important point is that events in general, and their inherent meanings, processes and social relationships in particular, can be better understood by locating their analysis in the context of their dynamic outside worlds. In other words, the external context provides an essential multi-dimensional framework for exploring the socio-cultural impacts of events. Inevitably, different external realities will be of greater or less relevance to different kinds of events. For
example, religious events, whether one-off events, regular festivals/rituals held in recognized locations (or, as Shackley (2001: 101) refers to them, ‘nodal’ events) or ‘linear’ events, such as pilgrimages, the socio-cultural impacts on participants, spectators, local communities and others must be considered within the context of understandings of different religions, the significance of the event within local culture, transformations in the significance or meanings of religion (or spirituality), particularly within postmodern, secularized cultures, and so on. Research has demonstrated, for instance, that visitors to particular sacred sites and events behave and respond differently according to their particular faith or belief (Collins-Kreiner and Kliot 2000). Similarly, the analysis of dark events, termed here thana-events – that is, those festivals and special events that have commemoration or display of death or the seemingly macabre as a main theme – should be considered within a broader socio-cultural context of post-conventional society (Stone and Sharpley 2008). In other words, as contemporary societies ‘demand an open identity capable of conversation with people of other perspectives in a relatively egalitarian and open communicative space’ (Hyun-Sook 2006: 1), thana-events may provide a temporal and spatial opportunity to collectively convey moral discourse about particular atrocities, tragedies, or customs (Stone 2009). For instance, events commemorating wars or battles must be considered within a framework of national/international politics, history, culture and a broader moral economy; the commemoration of Gallipoli, for example, is of particular cultural significance to both past and present generations of Australian and New Zealanders (Slade 2003). Consequently, each event and its socio-cultural impacts should be considered within its unique external realities.

However, it is possible to identify three potential impacts or consequences of events that, as suggested above, lend themselves to multi-dimensional analysis. This list is by no means exhaustive; nor does space permit a detailed discussion of each. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this chapter, it serves to demonstrate the breadth of the potential socio-cultural impacts of events and the benefits of a multi-dimensional approach in revealing them.

**Events and place identity/meaning**

Events of all kinds are being increasingly utilized or promoted as a means of enhancing the identity of places, both ‘externally’ and ‘internally’. Externally, events potentially serve to position or market places, to distinguish them in a world where places are becoming more similar and homogenous, and allow them to compete more effectively amongst a variety of stakeholders, including investors, tourists, policy-makers and so on (Richards and Wilson 2004). The purpose is typically economic: that is, to regenerate or build the local economy through attracting inward investment, new businesses or increased tourist visitation and expenditure, though of course socio-cultural benefits may also accrue through, for example, improved infrastructure, amenities and so on. Internally, the purpose of events and festivals is often primarily socio-cultural, to celebrate or strengthen local culture and, as a consequence, to enhance a sense of identity amongst local communities. Such events may also lead to an increase in tourism and associated economic benefits – as noted above. Indeed, the growing popularity of events may be explained by increased numbers of tourists seeking authentic experiences – as well as the inevitable dis-benefits associated with the development of tourism – yet, as research has shown, festivals and events may positively enhance community identity (De Bres and Davis 2001).

Beyond these immediate impacts, however, a number of issues deserve attention with respect to the socio-cultural impacts related to place identity and meaning creation through events. As is widely considered in the literature, place or, more precisely, place meaning is dependent upon semiotic truism and the polysemic nature of space. In short, construction of place identity
is not a given, but is a function of three elements, namely: the physical/objective environment; people’s experiences of place; and socially constructed meanings of places (Stedman 2003). Putting it another way, an undifferentiated space only becomes a place ‘when we endow it with value’ (Tuan 1977: 6). This value emanates from both the social constructs of place, or shared cultural understandings of a particular place, and the conscious choices people make regarding their use of places (Manzo 2003). Therefore, there is a general need to consider the impacts of events on place identity and meaning not only from the perspective of different stakeholders (visitors, local communities, event participants, event organizers) and non-stakeholders, but also within a framework of place meaning construction, for it is likely that different stakeholders will have different cultural understanding of places and different reasons for using them. These, in turn, will reflect the realities of each stakeholder’s cultural reality. For example, MacLeod (2006: 232) suggests that events can remain or become placeless as they become the focus of interactions between visitors seeking not authentic local culture but ‘convivial experiences with similar people converging in the no-space spaces of festival destinations’. In other words, the place culturally becomes subordinated or irrelevant to the activities of visitors/participants and, in the extreme, becomes simply the venue for what MacLeod refers to as ‘global parties’. For local communities, this may mean a loss of identity, or a transformation in identity more closely aligned with the event. For example, Glastonbury in the UK was traditionally known for its links with spiritual myth and legend, often being claimed to be the Avalon of King Arthur; nowadays, however, it is perhaps better known and more widely associated with the annual music festival and, arguably, the place is consumed as a rite of musico logical passage.

Conversely, the cultural identity and meaning of places (and local communities) may come to reflect the event and, consequently, ‘true’ culture is replaced by ‘an emphasis on the spectacular as the preferred experience of the visitor’ (MacLeod 2006: 235). Yet, rather than viewing this negatively, local communities may embrace it as a basis for a reformulation of local culture. For example, though not related to a specific event, it has been argued that, in Bali, ‘interaction with tourists and the tourist industry … has become such a central component in the definition of ethnic identity … that the very presence of masses of tourists is commonly cited by Balinese as proof of the continued authenticity of their culture’ (Wood 1998: 223; also Picard 1995). In other words, Bali’s culture has evolved into a tourism culture in a process that may potentially be repeated in event-specific contexts.

Events and social capital

As previously noted, commonly cited socio-cultural benefits of events relate to the development of community cohesion, the enhancement of community identity or image, the encouragement of community well-being. In some cases, this might be a primary objective of an event, particularly when it is organized and run at a local level; in other cases, it may be an expected or, indeed, unexpected by-product of an event. These impacts may also, of course, be negative. At the time of writing, for example, the controversy surrounding the readiness of the facilities for the 2010 Commonwealth Games in India may, irrespective of the eventual success of the Games, impact negatively on the image of the country and its people, both internationally and within the country itself.

Less attention, however, has been paid to the potential of events to contribute to the development of social capital. Arguably, this is a more fundamental and significant element in the enhancement of individual and community well-being, yet one which, according to some, is in decline as a result of the cultural and structural transformations in contemporary societies referred to above (Putnam 1995). This lack of attention may reflect the fact that social capital is a rather
ambiguous concept and, as Arcodia and Whitford (2006) suggest, it is difficult if not impossible to measure. Nevertheless, the concept of social capital provides a framework for developing a deeper understanding of the socio-cultural impacts of events on communities.

However, what is social capital? Adler and Kwon (2002: 17) define it as ‘the goodwill that is engendered by the fabric of social relations and that can be mobilised to facilitate action’ whilst Coleman (1988: 98), a notable proponent of social capital, states that

social capital is defined by its function. It is not a single entity but a variety of different entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of actors … within the structure.

In other words, social capital is a resource that arises from relationships or interaction between people or groups of people – that resource being manifested in, for example, trust, mutual support and co-operation, or a collective will to work towards particular objectives – and which create value through actions that result in benefits for society. In a sense, therefore, social capital may be thought of as a form of collective or community spirit embodied in a society generally, or within specific organizations, groups or institutions, which underpins positive actions for the benefit of society.

The question then is: to what extent can an event facilitate the development of social capital? Arcodia and Whitford (2006) propose three ways in which this may occur:

- **building community resources** – such resources include: skills and knowledge, social links between community groups, networks, volunteer groups, and so on;
- **social cohesiveness** – events provide the opportunity for community members to unite, for diverse ethnic groups to share experiences and world views, and to give voice to a common social purpose;
- **celebration** – collective participation in a celebratory event may generate a sense of community spirit, togetherness and goodwill.

Evidently, not all festivals will generate social capital through all of these avenues and, as Arcodia and Whitford (2006: 15) note, ‘the development of social capital will only occur in a positive social environment’; that is, negative impacts may actually diminish social capital. Nevertheless, social capital represents a potentially fruitful conceptual framework for assessing community social benefits (and costs) of events.

**Events and authorized transgression**

Festivals and events have long been associated with the creation of liminal times and spaces, where established social conventions may be temporarily relaxed, suspended or reversed. More specifically, festivals or carnivals have long been recognized as occasions where or when social rules and mores may be inverted, where particular activities or forms of behaviour that challenge social hegemony are indulged in and, importantly, temporarily permitted. In other words, a particular feature of festivity is that it is ‘related to the idea of transgression of the boundaries and taboos that define social and symbolic everyday life spaces’ (Picard and Robinson 2006: 11) and, moreover, that such transgression is, in a sense authorized. That is, the permitted organization of an event implies that the behaviour that occurs within the spatial and temporal confines of the event is also permitted or authorized.
Traditionally, such authorized transgression might have been considered a controlled social ‘safety-valve’ that, whilst contravening dominant social convention, did not represent a serious challenge to political or cultural authority (Humphrey 2001). Indeed, many contemporary events, from music festivals to carnivals celebrating a particular culture, may be thought of as continuing this tradition, whilst the creation of specific places, such as theme parks or particular mass tourist destinations, may be equally considered authorized locations of transgression. However, the socio-cultural impacts of events may be more significant than simply acting as a safety valve, a temporary, but controlled, ‘letting one’s hair down’. As post-conventional societies and cultures become more fluid and open to change, as notions of acceptable or authorized behaviour expand, the potential exists for certain events to contribute to social transformation, to dissolve the boundaries of socially acceptable behaviour and to influence social attitudes and, perhaps, even the law. Indeed, as the following case study suggests, in terms of heteronormativity and homosexual identity, authorized transgression of event space allows for the construction of social capital and subsequent privatized meaning, but within a public (festival) place. Consequently, tensions become apparent within the festival place between heterosexual hegemonism and a counter-hegemonist perspective of homosexuality.

### Pride or prejudice? The case of gay parades and counter-hegemonic identity

In July 2010, the gay rights organization Stonewall hosted their annual ‘Education for All’ conference at the British Library in London and focused upon homophobic issues faced by young people in the UK. Subsequently, the conference declared that it was ‘the new public duty which requires [oneself] to proactively consider and accommodate the needs of lesbian, gay and bisexual young people and promote equality’ (Stonewall 2010). Furthermore, the new Equality Act 2010 in the UK brings together a multiplicity of legislation aimed at promoting and securing equality, including sexual preference equality. Yet, despite the increasing acceptance of homosexuality, certainly in secular societies over the past few decades or so, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) individuals still suffer from a level of prejudice, either in society in general, or the workplace in particular, not afforded to heterosexual counterparts. Indeed, throughout history, homosexuality has been viewed as not only socially deviant but also criminal under a variety of sodomy and sumptuary laws. However, since the 1969 Stonewall riots in New York a LGBT rights movement, often referred to as ‘gay pride’, has emerged to promote cultural goals which include, but are not limited to, challenging dominant constructions of masculinity, femininity and homophobia, and the primacy of the gendered heterosexual nuclear family, or heteronormativity (Bernstein 2002). Indeed, the LGBT rights movement uses the term ‘pride’ as an antonym for ‘shame’, which throughout history has been used to socially and religiously control and oppress homosexual activity. As part of the challenging process, gay pride as a concept suggests that LGBT individuals should be proud of their sexual orientation and gender identity. Moreover, the modern gay pride movement has resulted in Gay Pride parades – organized hyperbole spectacles of music, costumes, and general showing off – that aim to affirm the homosexual Self within broader society. Presently, Gay Pride parades as mass participant events are held in many major cities and other urban spaces across the world, including Sydney, London and San Francisco. These in turn not only help expose LGBT inequality and broader homophobia within contemporary society, but also create a valorized branded space for the creation of a homosexual identity. Thus, Gay Pride events throughout the world are carnivalesque
constructions of gendered identity, allowing the temporary upsetting of the cultural order and social mores with loud laughter, bawdy songs, flamboyant costumes and lots of alcohol. As a result, Gay Pride events permit authorized ‘queer places’ of social acceptance for individuals, as well as mercantile returns for the host. As McCarthy (2011: 141) notes, the gay market has been defined largely through the concept of the Pink Pound and an emphasis upon hedonistic consumption where ‘desire has been appropriated as a motive that is predominately sexual’.

Consequently, Gay Pride events offer the LGBT Self a semiotic and authorized opportunity to (re)affirm sexual orientation through ritually transgressing polysemic spaces. In doing so, LGBT individuals both construct and draw upon a social capital of sexual identity by attempting to create social cohesiveness within a framework of celebration and candidness. However, Gay Pride parades are also microcosms of broader tensions within society, which according to Tomsen and Markwell (2007) have resulted in a steady undercurrent of hostility, abuse and unreported violent attacks by non-gays against LGBT individuals at Gay Pride events, particularly in the aftermath of the actual parades. Moreover, the political or religious elite often voice opposition to such events. For example, the inaugural Gay Pride parade in Bratislava, Slovakia, in May 2010 attracted fierce condemnation by anti-gay demonstrators who branded event participants ‘deviant’ and ‘perverts’ (Brocklebank 2010). Furthermore, Jan Slota, who is head of the Slovak National Party – a coalition partner in Prime Minister Robert Fico’s government – reportedly stated that he would attend the parade personally, ‘in order to spit’ (Brocklebank 2010). His corrosive comment, according to Brocklebank, drew little criticism from other leading politicians in a largely Catholic country.

![Figure 23.1 Conceptualizing Gay Pride parades: homosexual identity within a heterosexual hegemony](image)
Of course, the dichotomy between homosexual victimhood and heterosexual aggression is complex, and cannot arbitrarily be assigned to the Gay Pride parade phenomenon. Indeed, such discussions are beyond the scope of this chapter. Nevertheless, what is apparent is the discord between those with hegemonic power, which arguably is possessed predominately by those of heteronormativity persuasion, and those with a counter-hegemonic perspective – that is, the LGBT Self. Despite legislative and educative attempts in various countries to secure and promote tolerance for homosexuals, bisexuals, and transsexuals, it is within this multi-dimensional analysis of hegemonic dissonance and the broader cultural condition of society that Gay Pride events are largely conducted. Nonetheless, despite obvious inherent tensions between those who occupy an anti-gay platform (and who may be event observers), and those who are gay or transsexual (and who are the event participants), Gay Pride parades offer participants (and even observers) a unique opportunity to construct a specific social capital. Ultimately, this in turn may help sustain homosexual identity and meaning within a dominant heterosexual hegemony (Figure 23.1).

Concluding remarks

As events by their very nature are conducted within temporal and spatial boundaries, this chapter has encapsulated fundamental socio-cultural impacts from the organization, planning and performance of such events. Indeed, the chapter sought to clarify particular impacts of events and, in doing so, has suggested that event socio-cultural consequences are firmly grounded within the broader and well-established tourism literature. As tourism may be simply defined as the movement of people, then events are simply the gathering of people that result from such a movement. Of course, any such movement and gatherings of people require multi-dimensional analyses in order to determine broader business management and social scientific issues. Thus, with regard to the latter, this chapter has suggested that events, and particularly mass participant events, have socio-cultural consequences in common. Specifically, these revolve around notions of place identity/meaning, social capital and authorized transgressions. Indeed, by locating events and their inherent socio-cultural impacts within a paradigm of external realities, such as the example given to Gay Pride parades, then event organizers have the opportunity not only to manage the actual event, but also to understand and appreciate any event impacts and eclectic interrelationships with the cultural condition of society.

References

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