The Routledge Handbook of Festivals

Judith Mair

Introduction

Publication details
https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315186320-1
Judith Mair
Published online on: 22 Aug 2018

How to cite: Judith Mair. 22 Aug 2018, Introduction from: The Routledge Handbook of Festivals Routledge
Accessed on: 06 Dec 2023
https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315186320-1

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Festivals represent a vital part of human society, and they have done so for millennia. The history of festivals is likely to go far back into the past, long before the written history of civilisations began. The desire to mark particular occasions, such as equinoxes, solstices and harvests, with communal expressions of feelings has been around since the Neolithic times (Biaett 2017) and continues to this day. Festivals traditionally allowed respite from hard work and mundane daily life, injecting a certain amount of socialising, relaxation and rejuvenation into what Hobbes argued might otherwise be the solitary, nasty, brutish and short existence of many peoples throughout history. In recent times, the importance and number of festivals has increased, primarily in tandem with the increasing importance placed on festivals (and other events) as opportunities for increased tourism, branding and economic development. Boorstin (1961) refers to these as pseudo-events, but regardless of where you stand on the authenticity and effectiveness of such economically and politically motivated festivals, it is fair to say that they are booming and as such are deserving of significant research attention.

As noted, festivals hold multifaceted roles in society, spanning economic development, tourism benefits, social outcomes and others. Although many festivals have been held for decades or more and celebrate important religious or historic traditions, there are significant economic advantages to be gained from either ‘re-imagining’ them or from generating new festivals. For example, festivals (along with other types of events) can be staged or supported by governments for instrumentalist purposes – to bring positive economic impact, secure jobs and growth, underpin regeneration and catalyse infrastructure development (Getz 2009). Festivals and events are often sought after as part of a destination’s tourism product offering, for the competitive advantage that they lend a destination and for the marketing and branding benefits they offer (Jago & Dwyer 2006). Festivals are also often created by governments to address a range of social objectives, such as generating social capital, enhancing community cohesion, strengthening community resilience and encouraging tolerance of diversity (Duffy & Mair 2017). Finally, festivals have other roles, which are often underplayed in comparison to the neo-liberal economic development agenda. These include the opportunity for activism and protest, counterculture and catharsis.

Festivals have been the subject of considerable research, but much of this is highly fragmented, with studies on festivals appearing in a wide range of disciplines, including anthropology, sociology, human and cultural geography, marketing, management, psychology and
economics, and the broad field of tourism and hospitality. There have been attempts to bring this disparate knowledge together in review studies, with perhaps the best known being that of Getz (2010). Getz identified three major discourses from his review – a classical discourse, concerning the roles, meanings and impacts of festivals in society and culture; an instrumentalist discourse, where festivals are viewed as tools to be used in economic development, particularly in relation to tourism and place marketing; and an event management discourse, which focussed on the production and marketing of festivals and the management of festival organisations (Getz 2010). Other reviews have taken a discipline-specific approach (see, for example, Cudny 2014 on festivals and geography, Frost 2015 on festivals and anthropology and Dowson in this volume on religious and spiritual festivals). However, the subject is so vast it is difficult to get a sense of the full breadth of knowledge that lies at the heart of festival studies.

The Routledge Handbook of Festivals aims to bring this knowledge together in one volume, presenting an array of chapters that focus on a variety of topics, contexts and methods, thus contributing to our knowledge of festivals around the world.

Definitions and roles of festivals

Festivals are events which are designed for public participation; they may be either traditional or contemporary in form and celebrate a range of themes. In some senses, festivals appear to defy any neat definition – while Getz (1991) referred to them as public events that celebrate a specific theme, a cultural season or a time of year, he goes on in later work to consider them to be more of a spectrum of ideas (Getz 2010). There are several definitions that are used in order to create a basis for research, ranging from the very broad, ‘public themed celebrations that are held regularly’ (Wilson, Arshed, Shaw & Pret 2017, p. 196) or ‘social activities seen as an expression of social norms and the values of a society’ (Chacko & Schaffer 1993, p. 475), to the more specific ‘themed public occasions designed to occur for a limited duration that celebrate valued aspects of a community’s way of life’ (Douglas, Douglas & Derrett 2001, p. 358). It seems appropriate for me as editor of this handbook to examine how festivals can, or should, best be defined.

There are a range of characteristics that make it problematic to define festivals in one brief sentence. Thus, perhaps it is more appropriate to consider the full gamut of dimensions that have relevance to festivals in order to fully comprehend their scale and scope. The most important elements are highlighted. In relation to timing, festivals are almost always short term and are usually recurring (e.g. Saleh & Ryan 1993; Getz 2008). Another key dimension is that festivals are always open to the public – while there may or may not be an entrance fee or other charge, festivals are generally publicly accessible as opposed to closed meetings or events where an invitation is required (e.g. Kim, Uysal & Chen 2001; Wilson et al. 2017). In nature, festivals tend to be celebratory, although the specific theme of the celebration varies widely from religious and/or traditional to contemporary and arguably inauthentic (Green 1997; Douglas et al. 2001; Getz 2010; Jordan 2016). Nonetheless, the theme usually relates to an element of culture, be that traditional culture (religious or secular) (see, for example, Turner 1974 or Falassi 1987), high culture (such as opera, the arts or gourmet food, for example) or popular culture (such as folk or pop music) (inter alia Picard & Robinson 2006; Crespi-Vallbona & Richards 2007). Festivals are usually place-based and often celebrate the history, tradition or culture of a particular place (Hall 1989; Saleh & Ryan 1993; Derrett 2003; Getz 2010; Mair & Duffy 2015). Festivals are also social phenomena (Duffy & Mair 2017), and communities are at the centre of festivals, whether
that implies place-based notions of communities (which is often the case) or broader communities of interest (De Bres & Davis 2001; Arcodia & Whitford 2006; Moscardo 2007; Jepson & Clarke 2015; Black 2016). Festivals often, although not always, have a performative element, with music, songs, dancing, parades or other ways of showcasing a way of life. Finally, the behavioural and affective elements of festivals help to differentiate them. The behavioural dimension of festivals highlights that they are often used to provide recreation and entertainment involving interaction and socialising (Jago & Dwyer 2006; Lee, Arcodia & Lee 2012). In relation to the affective dimension, festivals are often considered to relate to feelings of belonging and sharing, connection and cohesion (Johnstone 2012; de Geus, Richards & Toepoel 2016; Duffy & Mair 2017).

Therefore, perhaps an appropriate, if lengthy, definition of festivals might be short term, recurring, publicly accessible events that usually celebrate and / or perform particular elements of culture that are important to the place in which they are held or the communities which hold them; that provide opportunities for recreation and entertainment; and that give rise to feelings of belonging and sharing.

Outline of contributions

The handbook is divided into nine sections based on the broad underpinning theories, concepts, contexts and topics of the chapters contained in each section. These are the Introduction, Sustainability, Festival Management, Festival Marketing, the Strategic Use of Festivals, Festival Experiences, Types of Festivals, Cultural Perspectives and the Future of Festivals.

Introduction

This section sets the scene for the handbook. The current Introduction chapter offers some initial thoughts on the definitions and roles of festivals. Following from that, Gouthro and Fox systematically examine recent developments in research in the festival sector literature, providing a detailed investigation of the methods and paradigms that inform research in this field and demonstrating the predominance of quantitative methods (particularly surveys) while at the same time highlighting issues for future festival researchers in relation to big data and ethics. Getz, Andersson, Armbrecht and Lundberg address the conceptual and philosophical issues associated with placing a value on a festival. Their chapter provides a theoretical and practical framework within which value issues can be addressed, using the dimensions of people, the economy and the environment. Finally in this section, Zhang considers the meaning of festivals, proposing a new semiotic approach. Zhang notes that while much research has concentrated on what is a festival, a better approach may be to interrogate how is a festival [experienced, understood, presented].

Sustainability

This section naturally covers the key fundamental tenets of sustainability – the economic, social and environmental impacts of festivals. Initially, Dwyer and Jago examine the economic evaluation of festivals, highlighting the challenges associated with developing techniques which give accurate results while at the same time being practical for policymakers making decisions on the allocation of scarce resources. This is followed by an analysis of
the social sustainability of festivals by Quinn, who points to the ever-increasing importance being placed on the ability of festivals to achieve social goals. Quinn concludes that festival research should examine the processes underpinning social change, taking account of the growing influence of more social science concepts and theories, and utilising more critical enquiry. An additional chapter on social sustainability is provided by Wilmersdörffer and Schlicher, who use a case study of the Wacken Open Air festival to analyse the interdependencies of sociocultural impacts and create a tool to assist in the development of policy for the sociocultural sustainability of festivals. Finally, Jones presents a discussion on the environmental sustainability of festivals; identifies common festival environmental issues and impacts, and how to minimise or mitigate these; and explores opportunities for festivals to contribute positively to environmental sustainability through legacy and education initiatives.

**Festival management**

The festival management section consists of a mix of practical management information and advice, and more conceptual ideas about the ways in which festivals can view their management models. Holmes, Lockstone-Binney, Smith and Rixon-Booth examine the perennial issues of volunteer management, reporting on a new volunteer management model for recruiting and managing volunteer programmes across a range of festivals which has widely been recognised as an example of best practice in this space. Hutton examines another important contemporary issue for festival managers – alcohol and drug misuse at outdoor music festivals. Hutton demonstrates how harm minimisation and health promotion activities can reduce reliance on the healthcare system and thus reduce the burden on the wider community. Sigala considers how social media are transforming the way that festivals are planned, managed and executed. Sigala’s chapter examines changes both in the place/space in which festivals occur and in the way in which a variety of actors now play a role in the initiation of festivals. In their chapter, which uses examples drawn from the Macau Arts Festival, Zhao and Lei investigate festival innovation. As they point out, while novelty is an often-cited festival attendance motivation, little is known about what constitutes novelty or how festivals can be innovative in their development of novel approaches. They conclude that further research is needed to understand innovation in the complex domain of festivals. Finally, Luonila examines networks of meanings in festival production. Luonila’s chapter sets out to capture the dimensions of meanings related to the fundamental activities of festival management and to analyse how these dimensions of meanings are reflected in managerial practices and decision-making, and thus can serve as a basis for comprehending the role and the effectiveness of festival stakeholders in festival production.

**Festival marketing**

Festivals rely on a multitude of stakeholders, and the chapter by Aktas and Sel takes a strategic marketing approach to examine an important festival stakeholder – the sponsors – and highlight a lack of research into festival sponsorship as it relates to festival context, location, scope and participant types. Using a case study of two festivals in Izmir, Turkey, the chapter demonstrates that there are a range of elements that contribute to the success of festival sponsorship. Moving to other forms of marketing, festivals are increasingly being expected to play a role in destination branding by offering an activity to encourage tourist visitation. This is not necessarily the fundamental raison d’être of festivals, and so it is important to
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Examine how successful or otherwise such festival marketing can be. Ayazlar examines the role of festivals in destination branding by taking a case study of a Turkish strawman festival, demonstrating clearly that while the festival may not have been started for tourism purposes, it nonetheless offers a unique and distinctive addition to the destination’s brand and product offering. However, Ayazlar draws attention to the risks associated with the use of the festival as a marketing tool, particularly those risks associated with loss of authenticity. Barrera-Fernández, Hernández-Escampa and Balbuena Vázquez take a different approach, examining the use of a cultural icon (in this case Cervantes) to promote a destination in Mexico with no apparent connection to Cervantes. In this case, there is no authentic link between the topic of the festival and the destination, yet the festival has led to the production of new tourist attractions and experiences, and to the branding of the destination as relating to Cervantes. Finally, Sigala examines social media and festivals, and adopts a co-creation approach for examining the use and impact of social media on two major festival stakeholders, namely festivalgoers and festival organisers. Sigala demonstrates that social media is having a transformational impact on the festival industry by changing the roles and the functions of these stakeholders to become more collaborative and social.

Strategic use of festivals

As has already been discussed in this chapter, festivals are increasingly being used as instrumental devices for a variety of policy aims relating to economic and social development. Devine, Quinn and Devine use a festival in Northern Ireland as an example of how festivals can be used to bridge divides, in this case a political, cultural and religious divide. Their chapter illustrates how the festival organisers were able to work through obstacles and encourage positive cross-community social interactions. In a similar vein, Wise, Armenski and Davidović use the example of the Exit Festival in Serbia, a highly successful festival that has grown out of protest and struggle, to document the relationship between festivals and the tourism they promote. However, this chapter offers a warning for destinations who fail to adequately work with festival organisers, leading to lost opportunities. Macau is the context for the chapter by Couto, which examines how the political and cultural situation in any given city or country can influence the success or otherwise of festivals. Couto problematises the idea of the eventful city, highlighting concerns over the instrumental use of festivals for boosterist purposes, to the potential detriment of the beneficial social outcomes of festivals. Mackley-Crump takes the example of the Pride Parade in Auckland, New Zealand, and discusses protests against a festival, providing a demonstration of what happens when the strategic use of festivals by municipalities comes into conflict with the communities the festivals are supposed to celebrate. The chapter identifies in particular the implicit tension between corporate and community stakeholders, and critiques of the homonormativity and commercialisation of Pride events. The chapter by Mackay, Fountain and Craddock-Henry focusses on the rural context and on the opportunities festivals create for enhancing social connectivity and resilience within communities. Taking two festivals in New Zealand as case studies, they emphasise the benefits of rural festivals as providing time and space for active citizenship, community collaboration and teamwork while at the same time offering essential economic advantages. Finally in this section, Best takes an autoethnographic approach and introduces the example of the Geelong Revival festival, which focusses on the heritage of Geelong (Australia) as a car-manufacturing city. Best argues that the festival encourages a tangible sense of Geelong’s community well-being and social capital as well as its historically significant automotive heritage.
Festival experiences

This section delves into the various ways of investigating, understanding and documenting the experiences associated with festivals as they apply to different stakeholders, including attendees and local residents. Stadler and Jepson examine the impact of festival attendance on family quality of life, highlighting findings about the importance of understanding the family unit (particularly where there are young families) as a particular market segment with specific needs and wants. Significantly, barriers to festival attendance are identified as cost, the potential overstimulation of children and the lack of opportunities provided by festivals for family bonding. Biaett takes a novel approach, using a confessional tale to exemplify experiences of attending festivals in terms of bonding and bridging social capital. The chapter concludes that a combination of collaborative and creative activities, a stimulation of the senses and the arousal of emotions create an atmosphere that can give rise to increased bonding capital and feelings of well-being. In a chapter examining the current state and future implications of ICT integration into festival experiences, Van Winkle, Mackay and Halpenny focus on the use of the internet, mobile devices and social media, investigating the implications of these trends for the festival experience. They suggest that while the topic is receiving research attention, further inter- and transdisciplinary studies are required in order to understand the implications of this dynamic field. Moving away from the attendee to local residents, Brás, Mendes, Guerreiro and Sequeira investigate how local residents experience their own festivals. Using the example of an Islamic festival in a small village in Portugal, the chapter considers both the experiences of residents during the festival and the subsequent meanings that locals attach to the festival. Bras et al. identify three key stages of resident involvement – a sensory experience, a cultural experience and a practical interaction experience. Finally, Coyle and Platt look to feminist politics and experiences to document a critique of festivals in relation to intersectional feminism. Their chapter examines festivals as a space for women, festivals as platforms for feminist politics and feminist festivals as spaces of empowerment, and draws important conclusions about the festivalisation of feminism.

Types of festivals

As identified earlier in this chapter, there is a multitude of different types of festivals that can be studied, each offering its own individual characteristics and contexts. Each of the chapters in this section uses a different type of festival as a basis for discussing a range of issues and challenges. Laing, Frost and Kennedy examine rural food and wine festivals, identifying some of the challenges faced by rural festivals, including lack of resources and expertise to keep the festivals viable in the long-term and attracting tourists to places that are geographically isolated. They conclude that such festivals can indeed bring economic and social benefits, and can bring together diverse stakeholders to collaborate on local food and wine branding. Lema, Cassell and Agrusa take music, media and film festivals in Montserrat as their starting point and use these to discuss the challenges associated with branding and marketing an island destination. Their findings suggest that music, media and literary festivals can support a sense of place for Montserrat and help to communicate the unique cultural underpinnings of the culture. Music festivals are also the focus of the chapter by Duffy, who takes a different approach, examining the relationships between music, identity and experience as mediated by performance. Duffy proposes that music festivals offer important forms of participation that facilitate belonging and identification through representational and experiential processes, and stresses the need for further research in this area. Religious and spiritual events form a large proportion of traditional and historic festivals, and Dowson reviews
the literature in this area to come to an understanding as to the current state of knowledge of this field of research. Whilst acknowledging the body of literature that exists from various disciplines, Dowson highlights the silo nature of much of this research and the fact that many festival studies remain uninformed by a large body of research that exists outside the discipline of the individual researcher. Dowson concludes by proposing a series of issues that would benefit from future research in this area. Finally, White and Frew examine the festive aspects of national day celebrations, in this case Australia Day, considering the role that such celebrations play in forging community and national identity. Drawing on ideas from Falassi (1987), they use the rites that occur during festivals (such as the rites of reversal, conspicuous display, conspicuous consumption, drama, exchange and competition) to demonstrate how aspects of national day celebrations could be classified as festivals. They conclude by posing questions around why some celebrations and legacies of Australia Day continue to generate such distinct and unique festive meanings.

Cultural perspectives on festivals

Festivals are intimately connected with culture, whether that be in relation to high culture and the arts, local traditions and heritage, popular culture or ethnic culture. This section provides examples of festivals from different countries, each addressing specific issues that face the festival sector. Helgadottir reports on the cultural sustainability of the Laufskalarett, a harvest festival in Iceland that celebrates the gathering of livestock (mostly horses) from summer pastures. Helgadottir outlines a range of changes to the festival that have implications for how it is perceived by the locals who identify with it. These changes include increasing festivalisation of the horse gathering and changes in the lived experience of the community as they participate in their traditional event. Ghana is the location for the chapter by Akyeampong, who presents a discussion on the differences between a traditional festival which has been in place for over 200 years and a newer presentation of a traditional festival that only began in the past decade. Using a festival-as-product framework, the chapter identifies questions around the history and cultural practices at each festival. Moving to Mexico, Hernández-Escampa and Barrera-Fernández document the Guelaguetza Festival and raise questions as to the role of tourism in relation to the pressure on the festival organisers to make changes to the traditional form and practices of the festival. While presenting a critique of the role of tourism in such changes, nonetheless, the authors suggest that paradoxically, the festival appears to represent a compromise between tradition and modernity as long as significant efforts are directed towards preserving what is considered genuine by the local community. Sharma presents an investigation of the role of festivals in sustainable tourism development in Rajasthan, India. Sharma is interested in clarifying the role of festivals in empowering communities and at the same time providing useful solutions for the challenges faced by festival organisers in remote and regional areas. The chapter argues that festivals are a key strategy in promoting those rural places that have suffered from underinvestment for long periods of time. Kaya Sayari and Gun offer an ethnographic investigation of the Water Festival in regional Turkey, drawing on the theoretical perspectives of habitus, doxa and heterotopia. Their conclusions show that for local residents, the boundaries between the festival event and their daily lives are porous, allowing for a reciprocal exchange of roles between insider and outsider, attendee and local. Finally, Kruger investigates the indigenous culture of Australia, using the case study of an Australian Aboriginal youth choir and focussing on the extent to which the Yugambeh Language and Song project facilitates the development of social capital and safeguards Aboriginal culture through performances at festivals.
Future of festivals

The final section of the handbook takes a look at some of the things that may be in store for festivals in the future. Peltz, Junek and de Ross examine virtual reality (VR), with a particular interest in how it can be used to teach the students that are to become the festival organisers and managers of the future. The chapter investigates how VR can be implemented to improve the teaching of festival management skills and highlights some of the challenges for educators and students that arise as a result of using the technology. Bossey takes a look at the potential digital futures for live performances at music festivals, basing his chapter on interviews with key industry personnel. Amongst other trends discussed are livecasts, holograms and networked performances. Immersive futures, such as using VR or working with entirely virtual artistes are also considered, although they appear less popular with the industry stakeholders at present. Finally, Yeoman et al. envision the future of the Wellington on a Plate Festival by drawing parallels with a predicted future scenario for a food festival in Tuscany. Key trends that might inform this future include growing health consciousness and an increased drive towards healthy, sustainable and local food, which may attract a premium. Learnings for the Wellington on a Plate Festival, and for other similar festivals, emphasise the importance of authenticity, community and collaboration.

Conclusion

This chapter has set the scene for the remainder of the handbook, highlighting the multifaceted nature and role of festivals in our societies. As well as providing some guidance on the definition of festivals, the chapter has identified a range of functions undertaken by festivals, including the maintenance of heritage and tradition, the showcasing of communities, the provision of access to culture of varied types and the economic development imperative which is driving the establishment and extension of many festivals around the world.

The chapter has outlined the various contributions in the handbook and hopefully has whetted the reader’s appetite to continue reading.

References

Introduction


