

'The real "worth" of festivals: challenges for measuring socio-cultural impacts'

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Key words

Festival and event management; event evaluation; social impact

Abstract

With festivals more attuned to consumer/production typologies, and festival audiences now overwhelmed by choice, competition for funding amongst festival organisers is high and the need to prove worth for funding higher still. This paper provides an overview of the key response to this situation, notably: event evaluation. In particular, it looks at the shifts that have occurred in festival and event evaluation and argues that even though the socio-cultural importance of festivals and events is becoming more recognised, economic measures remain the dominant paradigm for determining the worth or value of a festival to funding authorities. Furthermore, the paper argues that development of socio-cultural impact evaluation model (SCIE) is complex and requires a suitably flexible and critical approach.

Biography

Daniella Trimboli is a jointly-awarded Cultural Studies PhD candidate at the University of Melbourne and the University of British Columbia. Her dissertation investigates the theory of performativity and its application to multicultural arts practice in Australia and Canada. Daniella has worked as a teacher and researcher in Tourism and Australian Studies at Flinders University, and on events for the Queensland Folk Federation, including the Woodford Folk Festival and The Dreaming. Her research interest is in concepts of multicultural arts practice, the socio-cultural dimensions of festivals, and ethnic identity.

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The Asia Pacific Journal of Arts and Cultural Management is available at: www.ojs.unisa.edu.au/index.php/ARTMJ and is produced by the School of Management: <http://business.unisa.edu.au/management> University of South Australia: www.unisa.edu.au



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Introduction

Festivals are a socio-cultural phenomenon (Allen, O'Toole, McDonnell and Harris 2011; Getz 2005; Goldblatt 2011; Hall 1997) but it is only recently that they have been recognised as such in public and private spheres. Certainly, festivals have, as mapped by Richards and Palmer (2010: 4-12), changed their meaning and purpose over time, however, up until the late 20th Century, they played a more integral, less economically-deliberate role within communities – they were festive occasions, underscored by ceremonious, celebratory, and traditional motivations (see also Long and Robinson 2004). While these ideals remain central to some festivals, the argument by government agencies that they can act as tools for (primarily) economic and (subsequently) socio-cultural “development” – strategic drawcards for tourists and outlets for locals – has led to a significant increase in the number of festivals in the past twenty years (Allen et al 2011; Andersson, Persson, Sahlberg and Strom 2007; Brokensha and Tonks 1986; Getz 2005, 2007; Jago, Deery, Harris, Hede, and Allen 2002; Long and Robinson 2004; Rainisto 2003/4; Yeoman, Robertson, Ali-Knight, Drummond and McMahon-Beattie 2004). As Douglas, Douglas and Derrett (2001: 364) note, “the festival” as a product for quick-fixing community economic problems led to an almost over-saturation of festivals and events at the end of the 20th Century.

As we enter the second decade of the 21st Century, the festival is dealing with the repercussions of this “festival frenzy” – competition for funding is fierce and remains limited and difficult to obtain. In short: potential festival funders and audiences alike can afford to be discerning. Receiving financial support can be a significant challenge for the festival organiser and may preoccupy much of the planning time which would arguably be better spent on creating and staging the event. This concern was reflected in meetings held in 2009 (see below) between Steve Brown, Daniella Trimboli, Donald Getz and festival organisers at both Flinders University and the Adelaide Festival Centre (including representatives from the Adelaide Festival Centre, Come Out Youth Arts Festival and the South Australia Living Artists Festival).

It is in this context that event evaluation has appeared in contemporary festival and event discourse, becoming a critical subject for the industry in Australia and internationally (Allen, Harris, Jago and Veal 2000; Andersson et al 2007; Brokensha and Tonks 1986; Getz 2005, 2007; Jago et al 2002; Long 2008; Rainisto 2003/4). By analysing recent evaluation approaches, and highlighting the persistent dominance of economic modelling, this paper aims to illustrate the opportunities and threats that impact evaluation provides for festivals and events, especially to those of a small-to-medium scale. ‘Economic impact evaluation’ as it is used in this paper refers to the conceptual and practical tools currently in place to measure the economic effects of staging a festival or event in a particular location. These effects can include but are not limited to: expenditure at an event and the host destination, leakage of revenue, job creation and/or loss, and sponsorship/financial contributions to the host destination from external sources (Burgan 2011: 8; Jago and Dwyer 2006). This paper will consider this economic evaluation in contrast to emerging, and often oppositional discussions of the need to measure socio-cultural impacts of festivals and events. The term ‘socio-cultural impact’ used in such discourse broadly pertains to any ‘outcomes (planned or otherwise)’ which alter ‘quality of life’ or perceived cultural value for the festival’s host community and participants (Wood 2009: 175; Fredline, Jago and Deery 2003: 26). It is important to note that concepts of cultural value are contested and often beset by dualistic thinking, a point this paper will explore. Importantly, by critiquing the current framing of social impact evaluation, the paper aims to demonstrate that while a socio-cultural impact presence is a welcome relief in evaluation studies, there are also dangers in relying on the current socio-cultural impact evaluation (SCIE) approach.

Festivals, Funding and Evaluation

Funding is a critical factor for festival organisers, so it is not surprising that any discussion of contemporary festivals in recent years has featured the issue of

evaluation. That is, the issue of how to measure the positive and negative impacts of festivals so as to provide evidence that a festival meets the desired outcomes sought by funding authorities. With the need to attract dollars becoming increasingly important to the success of most festivals, it is also not surprising that the focus of this discussion has been predominantly angled towards economic evaluation (Hede 2007: 13). A literature review undertaken by the authors in 2005 revealed that studies on the impact of festivals were almost exclusively focussed on economic impacts with little or no attention to socio-cultural or environmental impacts (the so-called 'triple-bottom-line'). While a handful of social impact models were being developed in academic contexts, these were not being implemented by researchers with consistency or conviction. Such findings have been reiterated several times recently (Brown and Trimboli 2007; Daniels, Backman and Backman 2004; Hede 2007; Moscardo 2007; Reid 2007; Robinson, Picard and Long 2004).

The focus on economic evaluation has been framed in many ways by the political environment driving the funding system. In a similar experience to that which occurred in the United Kingdom (UK), the conservative Liberal and Coalition National government in Australia in the 1990s and into the 21st Century, has created an environment where funding for 'public good' is mostly considered in terms of production outcomes. As Selwood (2002: 20) notes in the U.K. context, the conservative 1980s Tory government focussed on public funding driven by 'efficiency, effectiveness and economy'. A similar shift in relation to culture, was mirrored by the Australian government in the late 1990s/early 2000s, steered by the then Minister for Communication and the Arts, Richard Alston. Alston argued that cultural organisations needed to undertake a business performance analysis to improve their financial footing, and in turn improve their chances of gaining both governmental and private funding contributions (Craik 2006: 6). This business-oriented shift was reflected in the 1999 decision by the Howard Government to replace the Australian Foundation for Culture and the Humanities with the Australian Business Arts Foundation (Gardiner-Garden 2009, online, viewed 29 July 2011). Glow (2010: 587, emphasis added) argues this 'business' framework has largely carried over into the present Labor Government's cultural strategy, summarising:

*the creative industries has become a framework for policy whereby financial support for cultural organisations and projects is (to some extent at least) based on the criterion that they can be considered a sound financial or social **investment**.*

This type of approach to funding has led many cultural organisations to participate in a discourse where cultural value is perceived predominantly in terms of 'product and output'. In many ways, the very notion of 'cultural value' in the Australian arts context has emerged, as authors like Gay Hawkins (1993) have described, as a means to legitimise the outcomes of arts organisations, especially community-arts organisations. In the context of SCIE therefore, 'cultural value' seems to emerge from within an economic paradigm; where 'culture' is assigned 'value' in an effort to legitimise its significance in policy and funding realms. There is clearly an element of nostalgia present in arguments pertaining to the need to protect "authentic" cultural value and promote its "worth", brought on by fears of globalisation (Hawkins 1993: 73; Khan 2011: 8), but also by the embedded economic rationalism within cultural policy and arts funding decisions. Additionally, the impact of the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) on the mindset of sponsors and governments, has served only to sharpen the focus on the economic "worth" of festivals and events to the exclusion of any other performance measure (Brown and Rasheed 2011, pers. comm. 10 May 2011). In light of this, the evaluation of festivals and events in Australia has almost exclusively been through the use of economic modelling to determine the return on investment (ROI) of those public and private sector organisations and instrumentalities which have provided financial support. In turn, the 'cultural agenda' is, as Cameron (2004: 34) posits, increasingly 'abandoned without understanding its value and sometimes even "sold" as a product'.

Consequently, the originating socio-cultural notions of the festival have been overshadowed by an overall shift in focus from 'festival-as-ceremony' to 'festival-as-product'.

This shift is particularly problematic for small-to-medium-scale festivals and events, which, aside from being more likely to have community rather than dollar aspirations, are disadvantaged by the type of economic evaluation modelling currently in use. In Australia there has been a shift from Input/Output modelling to Computable General Equilibrium (CGE) as the preferred evaluation methodology, and with this shift a change (usually negative) in impacts reported for even quite large events (Brown and Trimboli 2007: 1). No less, the scale of larger events means that they are likely to be better placed to attract commercial sponsorship and receive government funding, making the impact of this change less significant than that felt by smaller events already on the back-foot financially. What's more, the cost of implementing a detailed CGE evaluation is expensive and thus prohibitive for all but the large-scale events, further exacerbating the problem (Burgan 2011, pers. comm., 10 May). Although an affordable CGE evaluation software package, 'Encore', was developed in association with the Sustainable Tourism Cooperative Research Centre (STCRC), the software was not technically supported and a national review by Australian researchers identified some anomalies with the software, reducing confidence amongst some researchers in the results generated (Getz 2009, pers. comm., 15 October). The demise of the STCRC in June 2010 has meant that an upgraded version of the Encore software is unlikely to be forthcoming and small-to-medium-scale festivals and events are again without a recognised – and consistently applied – economic evaluation methodology. With development of the Encore software in suspension, and no current consensus by researchers – either nationally or internationally – on alternative evaluation software, festivals and events of different scales are being evaluated with a range of disparate models. There is thus no effective data to compare "apples with apples", or to determine the most effective means of evaluation for festival funding purposes.

As small-to-medium-scale festivals and events find it increasingly difficult to justify their worth, there is an urgent need to find alternative evaluation methods. Funders and cultural policy planners are not waiting while cultural organisations and researchers determine a way to measure the impacts of a festival appropriately – their budgets are forthcoming every year; so too their selection of "worthy" cultural recipients. Thus, the lack of appropriate models puts many small-to-medium-scale festivals and events at seeming risk of perceived failure. The Glendi Greek Festival, for example, an annual Adelaide festival with a thirty-year history, had to withdraw its staging in 2010 for an indefinite period due to 'financial and governance matters', including a decline in corporate sponsorship (Glendi Greek Festival Inc. 2010, online, viewed 14 January 2011). Glendi, the Greek word for 'party', is organised by the Lions Club of Adelaide Hellenic and attracts up to 40,000 patrons over two days (Glendi Greek Festival Inc. 2011, online, viewed 29 July 2011). Its programme incorporates dance, music, visual arts and education, and aims to provide opportunities for Greek traditions to be practiced and celebrated, while also appreciating the new, hybrid forms of Greek cultural practice within contemporary Australia. Despite the high and consistent involvement by the community, the socio-cultural elements were not enough to keep the festival afloat in 2010. The need to start thinking seriously about evidencing 'worth' in other terms aside from say 'ability to attract sponsorship' is henceforth critical (Brown and Trimboli 2007: 2).

Socio-Cultural Impact Evaluation (SCIE)

A number of authors have acknowledged the need for evaluation that extends beyond economics, and the last five years in particular have seen a drive towards social impact evaluation (SIE) or socio-cultural impact evaluation (SCIE) (Brown and Trimboli 2007; Getz 2005, 2007; Wuensch 2005). Such evaluation aims to measure the socio-cultural

impact that a festival or event has on its host state or community, and that henceforth justifies financial support. This drive is aligned with the burgeoning notion of sustainability and Triple Bottom Line (TBL) management and reporting (see Getz and Andersson 2008: 3; Hede 2007). At an Australian local level, there has been work undertaken to develop an inexpensive replacement for the Encore software. Such work has been led by Barry Burgan of the University of Adelaide, in collaboration with Steve Brown of Flinders University, and the State Government's event funding and support body, Events SA. The model being developed is still essentially economic evaluation; however, it additionally looks to provide an economic return for the socio-cultural and environmental impacts of the festival. The rationale behind this approach is that if the economists in Treasury are likely to have the final say in the worth or Return of Investment (ROI) of an event, then any TBL evaluation must have a number (in dollars) attached to it to be acceptable. Collaborative work is also occurring at an international level, with leading event researcher and author Donald Getz working in association with the University of Queensland, Flinders University of South Australia and Gothenburg University in Sweden on social impact methodologies. Such work considers the event's worth to a community, asking such questions as: if the event was not funded and was therefore not staged, how would the community feel about this? Can that be measured? Is such a state-wide census of the population a way of determining the event's worth to the community?

Similar questions have been asked in other studies, and some models – although rare – have been developed in academic contexts. The models being pioneered tend to be based on those implemented in the broader sphere of tourism social impact assessment, with particular similarities seen in methodological approach and survey design. The models generally incorporate the use of either factor analysis (see Cegielski and Mules 2002; Delamere 2001; Small 2007; Waitt 2003; Wood and Thomas 2006), or intrinsic cluster analysis (Fredline, Deery and Jago 2005a and 2005b; Fredline and Faulkner 2000; Fredline et al 2003; Fredline, Raybould, Jago and Deery 2004), and provide a good foundation for thinking through socio-cultural impact research.

Gaps and Critical Issues in SCIE Development

While such work is welcomed, it would be imprudent to take it on face value, or to see it as the solution for the regeneration of festivals and cultural recognition. SCIE is still a nascent area of research and remains problematic in that there are no agreed methodologies for evaluation, or an agreed philosophical platform to underpin those methodologies. At the European Cities Marketing Annual Conference held in Gothenburg in June 2009, a symposium was held prior to the conference, which was attended by many key international festival and event academic researchers. Many of the academics presented on and argued for the need for a suitable evaluation methodology to determine the socio-cultural impact of festivals and events. There was much informal discussion and it was agreed that event research efforts needed to be more collaborative to achieve a single, universal model that could be adopted internationally. There was broad agreement on this level of international collaboration and a website was set up to facilitate the exchange of information (see: <http://iphone.goodwin.drexel.edu/een>). However, the site has been underutilised and research continues to be independent and fractured. Indeed, this is one of the critical problems with which SCIE is faced – that most of the work is contained within organisations or academia, and not shared and linked together in a rigorous manner.

The continually fractured approach and overall apprehension towards SCIE might remain tied to the long-recognised problem that SCIE is difficult because of the intangible nature of socio-cultural effects (see, for example, Getz 1991 and Moutrey 1994). Certainly, socio-cultural impacts are problematic in that they are variant and non-confirming, and trying to define 'social impacts' as a variable for measurement is both

difficult and complex. Take, for example, the definition given by Fredline et al (2003: 26) of social impacts as 'any impacts that potentially have an impact on quality of life for local residents'. Of this definition, one could ask: if the social impact is felt at the level of the non-resident, does that social impact still count? And what does 'quality' mean in this context? These sorts of questions create an uncertain research environment that many cultural organisations and researchers remain hesitant to work within.

If equal weight was given to socio-cultural and economic impacts, then the issue of how to effectively measure the intangibles of socio-cultural impacts would be more easily resolved. There would, as a starting point, be the basis and incentive for festival organisers (from the viewpoint of the securing of funding for the event) to measure and to report results in this way. It would also provide a platform from which a critical examination of the nature and parameters of 'socio-cultural impacts' could take place. After all, economic evaluation as the sole measurement of a festival's impact or worth has its complexities and problems, too, and the best means to carry it out is, as outlined above, still being debated. What's more, there are also intangible aspects of economic evaluation, but these have tellingly been managed without too much concern. For example, economic management of all forms does, as Holden (2004: 39) points out, have tools to identify and measure intangible assets, such as brands, trademarks etc. This begins to destabilise the argument that unlike economic impacts, socio-cultural impacts cannot be assessed because of their intangible nature. The underlying issue seems, rather, to go back to a lingering perception that economic value is more important than socio-cultural value, even if this is only a perception taken on by default, or as a means to a funding end. This is further supported by the fact that, regardless of the now more common requirement for sustainable management and Triple Bottom Line (TBL) reporting to include socio-cultural aspects, work around these concepts often remains underpinned by the economic argument. Hede's (2007: 19) recent study of fourteen organisations found, for example, that the majority did not value or utilise data on the social or environmental aspect nearly as much as the economic outcomes. This is not necessarily indicative of a lack of concern from organisations about these aspects – they are cultural organisations after all – but more likely that they are too frequently made to meet economic ends before socio-cultural and environmental ones are considered (Holden 2004: 13).

Due to the persistent dominance of the use of economic values, the best strategy may be to place a similar emphasis on the socio-cultural dimension using similar tools as those employed in economic evaluation. However, it is critical to note that developing SCIE based on economic evaluation, even as a purely oppositional tactic to it, may only serve to disadvantage socio-cultural aspects in the future, inadvertently demolishing the very 'cultural' aspect it attempts to protect. Previously, the concern has been that models and research into measuring socio-cultural impacts was absent due to uncertainty about how to undertake it. Now, there may well be a socio-cultural impact presence, but the concern has shifted, or, at the least, been compounded. The new concern is that in having to prove the worth of a festival, the actual "worth" of the festival becomes expressed in production terms. In working against social impact benchmarks, the festival might satisfy short-term funding requirements but serve only to feed a system that lacks socio-cultural measures in the long-term. As Holden (2006: 34) argues, cultural organisations are constantly forced to 'make their case' to government 'in terms that do not match their own concerns'. John Fox (2005) of U.K.-based Welfare State International summarises the sentiments of many cultural organisations when he argues:

We joined to make spontaneous playful art outside the ghetto – not to work three years ahead in a goal-oriented corporate institution where matched funding and value added output tick boxes destroy imaginative excess.

This concern was reflected in Australia, as the 2009 meetings of festival professionals at Flinders University and later at the Adelaide Festival Centre indicated. The outcomes

of the two meetings reflected concerns enunciated by Smith and Forest (2006: 136) and Brown (2009: 27) respectively, namely, that as festivals (in this case in Adelaide) become increasingly positioned as economic tools or products, rather than being 'an end in themselves', the audience is inevitably placed second; out-raced by the funding bodies' criteria. The concern here, in short is that 'creativity' is in danger of becoming a checklist and 'culture' a pre-defined (but primarily economic) outcome.

It is worth noting here that this perceived bind is a prevalent one in arts discourse. As Rimi Khan (2011) explains, there has been much tension in arts discourse surrounding the value of art as either intrinsic or instrumental. There is, on one hand, a belief that art has intrinsic value which needs recognising in policy arenas; on the other, a fear that this act of recognition will turn art into a purely instrumental tool (Khan 2011: 71-74). Implementing SCIE 'for economics' sake' is clearly paradoxical, and therefore unlikely to alleviate this bind. This is especially the case since 21st Century festival consumers demand 'authentic', engaging and localised experiences. Festivals, of course, are never fully authentic; they are carefully planned, orchestrated and staged. But they work at their truest and most remarkable when they successfully set up a space for genuine and transformative engagement between festival and patron. That is, when they create a space between the known plan and the unknown outcome – the liminal space – where stage and patron engage to create an experience. So, while festivals do purposively make worlds, they also, as Waitt and Gorman-Murray (2008: 186) assert, unmake them, too. As Duffy (2004: 92) outlines, '[t]he liminal period temporarily suspends conventional social rules, so opening up a space of potential change'. What this potential change will be is not known in advance; nor should it be:

Cultural experience is the sum of the interaction between an individual and an artefact or an experience, and that interaction is unpredictable and must be open. To take a concrete example, it is the job of a gallery to put a painting on a wall, but it is not their job to determine what happens next. They cannot, and should not, require that 40% of viewers will have a spiritual experience in front of it (Holden 2004: 21).

Undoubtedly, many entrepreneurs have, as Getz and Andersson (2008: 2) acknowledge, "cashed-in" on the marketing pull of festivities, creating festivals for "finance over heart". But it is not our place or our desire to suggest that art that considers economics first is "not really art", since so many artists employ that tactic (see Caust 2010: 571) – and must – and since many financially-driven arts projects (including festivals) certainly provide positive socio-cultural impacts. In a postmodern context this is neither shocking nor necessarily unacceptable, however, a finance-prioritising framework can nonetheless work to jeopardise those festivals in Australia that continue to hold community and ceremony at the core of their purpose and delivery. (Take, for example, the community-driven Woodford Folk Festival and its sister-festival, The Dreaming. Interestingly, significant financial difficulty has meant the festivals will be merged in 2011 – and what this means for the socio-cultural quality of each is arguable). If festivals succumb to what Holden (2006: 30) refers to as the 'service-agent' typology, then the drive to evaluate may actually contribute to the erosion of the "festival" element of these special occasions, which many festival organisers and researchers adamantly attempt to protect. Festivals, like any form of cultural expression, cannot be read, as Robinson, Picard and Long (2004: 18) urge, as 'streamlined narratives'. However socio-cultural impact assessments that work to match pre-defined "success" markers attempt to do this.

Moving Forward

For genuine development in this area, the means by which SCIE occurs must include two key aspects. First, it must be open enough to allow for the fluidity and transition of

socio-cultural “value”; and second, it needs to provide opportunities to critique any methods put in place. Researchers and festival organisers alike cannot afford to overlook the fact that any impact measurement – including SCIE – will have political motives and implications. ‘Cultural value’ is by no means a neutral term, which is why Cameron’s (2004: 34, emphasis added) usage of the term ‘cultural agenda’ is so relevant in this context. The task of SCIE is unavoidably a task of inclusion and exclusion: models select and delineate those socio-cultural elements deemed “most important” at a point in time, and this is always driven by a range of changing considerations – including economic. Undoubtedly, this does create a ‘murky’ working territory, but that territory is surely part of the motivation behind the recent SCIE movement – and indeed – cultural projects in general.

Importantly, SCIE cannot be framed by a debate about economics or socio-cultural value – both have an important role to play in the planning, development, management and support of festivals and events. Proceeding with an either/or approach in SCIE will serve to do little more than reinforce the binary between the two aspects. What is required, therefore, is a contextual shift; a redefined understanding of cultural worth that sees the socio-cultural aspect as an embedded part of the festival/cultural policy process, rather than as a marginalised, “add-on” benefit, or as something “pure” and distinct from economic relations. As Robinson, Picard and Long (2004: 188) argue:

...the festival needs to be linked to the wider sociological, economic, and political context of change, as a site to reconstruct and re-enact meaningful narrations of the collective being in the – globally enlarged – world.

Thus, while calls for holistic assessment or universal modelling might seem necessary in order to establish a festival’s worth – and while such an approach may work for economic impact studies – this is not necessarily functional or useful for social impact studies. There is clearly a need for quality and consistent data, however, data collection can ‘all too easily become an end in itself ... or a means to postpone decisions until there is solid evidence – which is never quite solid enough’ (Holden 2006: 49). The way forward might not be so much in “pinning-down” one strict model but in accepting that such a task is neither possible nor necessary. If researchers are to “pin down” anything, it should be their commitment to the rigorous exploration of socio-cultural aspects – both philosophically and methodologically.

In light of all this, the work of Sascha Reid (2007) and Emma Wood (2009) provides useful examples for how research might proceed in this area. Reid’s study is critical of social impact assessment that uses positive and negative scales, emphasising the idea that assessment needs to be flexible rather than based on a “one size fits all” model, so as to ‘explore the intricacies and varying social constructions’ of measured social themes (Reid 2007: 97). Wood (2009: 178) proposes a ‘standardized [SCIE] framework’, but remains astute to shifts in socio-cultural variables and argues the details of individual models should be flexible and event-specific. Significantly, both studies understand the need to provide quality assessment that remains relevant and useful for industry (i.e. still with a quantifiable aspect to their assessment), while simultaneously understanding the nature of festivals as culturally contextual. Such work departs from some of the Australian work by Jago, Deery and Fredline (2006;2002) and Katie Small (2007), which, in its calls for ‘holistic assessment’, demarcates clear socio-cultural categories and thus may be in danger of streamlining the socio-cultural impact assessment too much. Perhaps, using both Wood’s (2009) and Reid’s (2007) approach will help address the paradox the industry finds itself in. That is – a pressing need, on one hand, to prove the socio-cultural relevance and importance of festivals to balance the sole reliance on economic measures, and an equally pressing need, on the other, to avoid SCIE that pigeon-holes community festivals for solely political ends.

Conclusion

Although many contemporary festivals remain driven by a desire to celebrate, interrogate and explore socio-cultural values, they are increasingly operating within an economic measurement paradigm. The competitiveness associated with much-needed funding, together with an overarching cultural policy framework driven by “production outcomes”, means many festivals become side-tracked from their original aims in order to evidence the financial worth of their event. Festivals and events are now quite accustomed to having to use some form of economic evaluation model, although, as argued, these have been wrought with problems of consistency and reliability. What’s more, the models have been shown to favour larger, and often more financially-stable events.

Festival and event professionals, in both academia and industry, have identified this as a threat to community and artistic expression, especially to those events of a small-to-medium scale. The past decade has thus seen increasingly frequent attempts to reassert the validity of socio-cultural elements associated with festivals and events. While this has included a much welcomed development of social impact evaluation models, this paper has argued that these remain vastly under-utilised and explored. In light of this, there needs to be recognition by government and other funding organisations that support for festivals and events implies a responsibility for the funding provider, too. This responsibility lies in supporting the endeavour beyond solely justifying by numbers, and therefore supporting research into genuine Triple Bottom Line evaluation.

While consistent and more thorough research needs to be undertaken to develop suitable evaluation models and methodologies for SCIE, this paper has stressed the need for this development to retain a critical eye. As has been outlined, adopting SCIE could lead to the prescription of streamlined socio-cultural effects, which seems only to defy the argument for the importance of socio-cultural value. As an oppositional tactic to the economic paradigm, it can also serve to reinforce the binary between economics and socio-cultural debates, when what is actually needed is an examination of how these are intricately tied together. As argued, SCIE has a political agenda, too, and this is always time and place specific. Collaborative research is an important step forward, but it requires a strong determination to develop models and methodologies that can be broadly relevant, not just universally applied. In view of this, the work of Small (2007) and Wood (2009) provides useful examples of how models can be developed to meet basic quantifiable checks, but remain fluid enough for the festival to embrace its culturally-specific pursuits. Utilising such research and iteratively (re-)designing the event to maximise the positive impacts and minimise the negative impacts, will make festivals more capable of withstanding the fluctuations in funding fortunes that are always a part of the contemporary event industry.

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