
Guest editorial: Special issue introduction repurposing and repositioning events: real, responsible and revolutionary futures

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This special issue set out to explore the challenges and future paths of the events sector in responding to COVID and a post-pandemic world across the themes of real and immediate challenges, responsible events (in terms of governance and responsibilities to stakeholders) and prospective revolutionary futures. The special issue sought to consider what can be the purpose and role of events now and into the future and can we repurpose and reposition events in life, in society and for the future.

Organised events – in current and new forms – may have opportunity to determine fresh paths, to make the future less fearsome and to allow more positive outcomes. This special issue called for conceptual and empirical papers that recognise that social, civic and civil society are changing more rapidly than at any other point in modern history. In conjunction, we have all been struck by the unfolding reality that has come to fruition since the World Health Organisation (WHO) declaration of COVID-19 as a global health emergency, and the United Nations announcement also of a similar global emergency with climate change.

In light of this turbulent environment, it is questionable whether “business as usual” models of operating will continue to be effective as event operators deal with increased risk, rising costs (e.g. insurance, production), consumer uncertainty and the new norm in which pandemic-proof events must ensure the health security of attendees, participants, staff and other stakeholders, whilst delivering a quality and memorable event experience. We need to look forward.

This special issue includes seven papers that seek to address these various challenges, many of which adopt qualitative approaches that provide rich accounts. Adopting a health-related lens, the article by Schütte, Schönefeld, Schulte and Fiedrich addresses how safety and hygiene aspects interact during the planning and implementation phases of events. The authors draw on qualitative data using semi-structured expert interviews and observations at five major events in Germany including sporting and music events and a Christmas market. One guiding assumption of the study was that there are major interrelations between event and health safety concepts, which become visible during planning and the implementation of event-related technical, organisational and personal measures. Findings revealed that hygiene is not perceived as an integral part of event safety, but rather as a disconnected pillar beside traditional event safety measures and that event and health safety measures strongly influence each other, both positively, but often also negatively as event organisers are often concerned with how to get their events successfully through the approval process rather than focussing on the safety aspects. As most studies to date have focused on the effectiveness of hygiene concepts and impacts of COVID-19 on the event sector in general, the key contribution of this paper is that it examines more closely the interactions between event and health safety. It also revealed that although the German events industry showed great resilience over the pandemic period, profound changes in practice have not eventuated.



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Piccioni, Nosi, Ottolenghi and Nevi, drawing on Italian data, explore what such a profound change might look like in respect of the business event sector. Change in event management process, development of new event manager competencies and the adoption of new business models to produce virtual and hybrid business events are each stated as transforming business event strategies. The paper reviews literature relating to the impact of COVID-19 on the event industry, generally, as well as discourse around the possible transformative influence of the digitisation of the business event. As an exploratory work, a thematic analysis was conducted of data sourced from semi-structured depth interviews with 26 business event managers in Italy. Respondents voiced their belief that adaption and digital innovation affected by the pandemic will be integrated into future business event practice. In their discussion, the authors cite a heightened awareness of environmental impacts; the capacity for reaching new event audiences; cost saving technology and the growth of digital project management as contributory factors towards this integration. In acknowledging the limitations of a project reliant on data from one country, the authors indicate the value of pursuing a similar study elsewhere. They further propose a set of considerations for the future relating to fairness and wellbeing that may give insight for practitioners and policy makers when dealing with future world crises.

Stewart, Ali-Knight, Holmes and Kerr, highlighting a lack of business innovation and crisis management models for festivals, propose a risk management model for resilient festivals. Drawing on mixed-methods qualitative data (interviews and observational data), the paper provides a case study of how the 11 recurring festivals comprising Edinburgh's Festivals innovated and adapted their business models in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings suggest that whilst the festivals collectively showed commonalities in the innovations adopted in terms of changing venues and moving online, each individual festival championed their own unique innovations around staffing and structures, financial management, festival delivery, programming and audience development. The authors contend that "business as usual" is dead, replaced by the "new normal", which has been mostly positively received by the Festivals'. The proposed risk management model focuses on the "3R's" – Respond, Resilience and Reimagine. Respond, as in the effective immediate response to a crisis, Resilience in terms of fostering strategic resilience within organisations to buffer against shocks and Reimagine, which focuses on innovating business models and festival delivery practices. The model is interlinked by a central focus on maintaining communication and support within the festival organisation, amongst key stakeholders and broadening out to the wider community. The authors call for continued research to monitor festival trajectories as we learn to live with COVID-19.

Additionally on the theme of transformation, Steriopoulos and Ooi examine how iconic sporting events can create transformative experiences for the organisers, attendees and the community. The authors use the case of the Melbourne Cup, an iconic horse racing event in Australia, which has received criticism due to animal rights concerns resulting in reduced attendance prior to COVID-19. Despite this denigration, the authors document the important historical role that the Melbourne Cup has both within the local community and nationally in Australia, the significant economic contribution generated by the event, and the wide range of social impact activities in which the event organisers engage.

The authors argue that Transformative Sports Service Research (TSSR) provides a means for the event organisers to engage with their audience in addressing negative event impacts and perceptions. They adapt the Transformative Service Research approach to create this new framework, TSSR, for managers of iconic sports event brands to use in guiding change where it is needed. In doing so, the authors offer a new theoretical lens for viewing the breadth of event impacts and outcomes, both positive and negative, responding to long-held calls for new and event-specific theories (Getz and Page, 2016). The authors provide practical

examples of how TSSR can work to create positive social and cultural outcomes for different event stakeholders.

The paper by Walters seeks to extend the discussion on the importance of inclusivity in event practice. Acknowledging the prevalence of disability in its various forms in society and highlighting the fact that existing research exploring inclusive events and disabled people as event participants focuses mostly on the challenges faced by attendees, the author offers a refreshing perspective by exploring the potential that these events have and the opportunities they bring to people with disabilities and the wider community. In fact, the author embraces the argument suggested in the call for papers of this special issue that events provide opportunities to determine new paths, make the future less fearsome, allow more positive outcomes and uses this description to define what they propose to be “revolutionary futures”. The context of the study is the InterACT Disability Arts Festival, an arts festival in New Zealand created to celebrate the achievements of disabled people in a wide range of arts. In an exploratory case study inspired by a hermeneutics approach and combining different methods of data collection, the author explores the perspectives of attendees, volunteers, event staff and organisers to investigate if the event can indeed create revolutionary futures. In their analysis, the authors focus on three aspects – determining new paths, making the future less fearsome and allowing more positive outcomes – identifying sub-themes in each category, thus highlighting the significant potential of the event in driving and promoting better communities. The authors unequivocally posit that inclusive arts events have the potential for change. Using the three themes as pillars, the authors finish with a conceptual framework for assessing the contribution of events in creating a future that amplifies the meaningful and positive outcomes of these events for the disabled community and beyond. The framework has clear implications for festivals that seek to be inclusive and shape the future.

Đurić, Kennell, Vujičić, Stamenković and Farkić offer a critical events studies perspective in their investigation of the protest roots and the evolution of a major music festival from the perspective of stakeholders. In doing so, the authors explore how protest events change over time and how this evolution is contextualised in a complex social and political landscape. The authors used the case of the EXIT festival, an event that started as a protest event in a period of turmoil and political disruption in Serbia and went on to become one of the largest mainstream European music festivals.

The paper begins with a discussion of the notion of protest events and the different related terms. Inspired by neo-institutional theory, the authors present a conceptual model explaining the changing nature and role of the festival linking the past, present and future. This framework serves as the basis for the methods of the study. To capture the different perspectives, the authors interviewed a variety of stakeholders who have been involved with the event at various stages of its history.

The findings include a discussion of a wide range of themes including contested origin narratives and the authentic identity of the event. In addition, the drivers behind the changes that saw the identity of the festival evolve are presented, highlighting how the internal and external settings are intertwined in this evolution. In this context, wider social and cultural changes, the role of changes in leadership of the festival, and the internationalisation and commercialisation of the festival are explored. The authors found that with the growing popularity of the festival and its establishment in the mainstream culture, the EXIT festival has become more aligned with the institutional environment and its protest element has gradually dissipated in the eyes of stakeholders. Despite the changing role, the authors found that the festival still held a potential role in facilitating future social change, highlighting how the past legitimises the potential of the event.

In the only dedicated quantitative paper in the special issue, Al Rousan, Khasawneh, Sujood and Bano focused on the event consumer and their intentions to re-engage in tourism

and hospitality (T&H) focused events, which are held in part to promote the appeal of the host destination to visitors. Using the concepts of the theory of planned behaviour (TPB) and integrating a perception of COVID-19 construct, the authors conducted an online survey in 2021 to a convenience sample of Indian consumers who followed events on social media sites. The results indicated that the perception of COVID-19 construct had a significantly negative effect on intentions to participate in T&H events; however, attitudes as conceptualised by the TBP framework was the strongest predictor of behavioural intentions. The authors suggest that the findings have implications for how event organisers market T&H events to lessen consumer uncertainty about attending events post-pandemic.

Based on this collection, ample future research directions and practitioner implications have been identified for supporting real, responsible and revolutionary futures in repurposing and repositioning events going forward.

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