



Experiential places or places of experience? Place identity and place attachment as mechanisms for creating festival environment



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HIGHLIGHTS

- Place identity and place attachment key mechanisms in creating festival environment.
- In-depth interviews at festival explores consumer's lived experience of environment.
- Perceived environment vital to festival attendee's positive perception of event.
- Model shows either: environment creates festival, or festival creates environment.

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ABSTRACT

Tourism theory suggests mechanisms of place are critical in the construction of tourism environments. However, contradictory place theory has created confusion as to exactly what these mechanisms are and how they affect perceived environment. Literature identifies place attachment and place identity as primary mechanisms in the construction of tourist relationships with tourist environments. An interpretive methodology is used to explore these mechanisms during a festival experience, and thematically analyzed unstructured interviews show identity and attachment do influence attendees' place-based perceptions. Within the festival context, environments become either creations of the festival or exist independently of them. The latter allows realistic place identity to form, resulting in consonance between environmental expectations and reality. The former creates abstract identities resulting in unrealistic expectations and weak/no immediate attachment to the festival environment. A Model of Festival Place provides continuity-based festival recommendations allowing for clearer theoretical and practical understanding across tourism events.

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1. Introduction

Recognized as culturally and economically significant tourism events (Rihova, 2013), European music festivals play a large role in the live music industry; in 2013 over 1400 festivals generated revenue of £1.5 billion (Mintel, 2014). As well as economic gains, these festivals are crucial in promoting tourism by: perpetuating local traditions (Felsenstein & Fleischer, 2003); regenerating areas economically, socially, and culturally (Sorokina, 2015); promoting creativity among entertainers, tourists, and locals (Wilks, 2009); and encouraging interaction and involvement across the entire industry (Smith & Richards, 2013). To capitalize on these benefits, a number of tourism and festival event models (e.g. the Customer Experience Management Framework, the Servicescape Model, and

the Festivalscape Model) offer semi-procedural guides for creating and hosting festival events. However, these models are constrained by their objective nature; emphasis on the subjectivities of the event is lost leading to possible commodification of authenticity and erosion of unique cultural identity (MacCannell, 1992). Whilst issues can be addressed independently, problems rarely occur in isolation; festivals face pressures from: increasing international competition, increasing artists' fees, a lack of suitable headliners, declining sponsorship, increasing production costs, and changing safety legislation (IQ Magazine, 2016). With the industry unable to cope with these varied demands, European festivals are losing much of what makes them special.

While existing tourism literature advocates a holistic approach to the problem (Lee, Arcodia, & Lee, 2012), it is this ambition that is partially responsible for a lack of easily applicable and implementable management solutions. With more detailed research

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essential in the context of music festival management (Hudson, Roth, Madden, & Hudson, 2015) and attendee behaviors (Dolnicar & Ring, 2014; Organ, Koenig-Lewis, Palmer, & Probert, 2015) this paper specifically addresses the weak theoretical understanding in the relationship between festival environment and festival attendee. It does so by investigating the role of place at three Scottish music festivals, exploring how attendees interact with the festival environment. With a focus on the subjective relationship between festival attendee, place identity, and place attachment, strong conceptual and practical foundations emerge; it is from these foundations that the festival industry can rebuild and retain its significant and special cultural heritage.

To achieve this, the paper divides into four sections. Firstly, literature explores and develops the subjective environment as a necessary component of the tourist experience. Specifically, contradictions between place identity – a sub-structure of identity consisting of cognitions, attitudes, values and tendencies belonging to a particular place (Proshansky, Fabian & Kaminoff, 1993) – and place attachment – the affective and emotional relationships that individuals form with specific places (Kyle, Graefe, & Manning, 2005) – are addressed as a means to articulate the theoretical gap that currently exists. Following this a detailed overview of the methodological approach is given. Qualitative in-depth interviews within the festival environment are selected. Although unique, exploration and understanding in context are necessary to show idiosyncrasies of the festival environment and attendee experience. Interpretation of data is then offered to understand how festival attendees perceive and interact with the festival environment. The final section draws together all threads of the research, and in doing so confirms academic development whilst providing key practical implications and recommendations for festival and tourism event organizers.

2. Literature review

The review of literature is structured so as to emphasize the importance of the relationship between festival environment and attendee, whilst simultaneously showing the confusion that exists in extant attempts to apply place theory to events and festivals. To reduce this confusion, current place theory will first be decontextualized – only through understanding root constructs can place theory be accurately adapted to the festival event context.

2.1. The festival and its physical environment

A key asset of any festival is its ability to offer a temporary distinctive environment (Richards & Wilson, 2006). Such versatility provides the individual with an immersive and non-routine event experience (Kirillova, Fu, Lehto, & Cai, 2014). Immersion in such an environment allows the individual–environment relationship to develop, and with it meaningful two-way interactions also develop. Individuals therefore become responsible for creating and sustaining the environment, while the environment becomes responsible for influencing thought processes (Urry, 1995), and a unique setting shaped by individual beliefs is created (Murphy, Moscardo, & Benckendorff, 2007). Becoming a social construct rather than an objective reality, the festival develops not only physical characteristics but also affect and meaning (Johnstone, 2012). Adopting this multi-layered approach, the festival environment becomes a contextually relevant factor (Lee, 2001); it creates a location, history, heritage, and reputation supported by brand, authenticity, commitment, and sustainability (Aitken & Campelo, 2011). To best develop and utilize these characteristics, a comprehensive understanding of the wider literature surrounding mechanisms and effects of environmental behavior is needed (Cheng &

Kuo, 2015). Problematically, however, as a result of different theoretical bases conceptualizing similar observations with different terminology (Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001), for example sense of place (Tuan, 1974), place bonding (Relph, 1976), and place attachment (Gerson, Stueve, & Fischer, 1977), distinctions are nuanced and theoretical clarification is needed (Cui & Ryan, 2011). To achieve clarity, it is necessary to revisit place constructs initiated in psychology and environmental psychology and evaluate them *sans* context. Decontextualizing theory in this manner overcomes problems associated with contradictory and divergent terminology, and allows application of accurate and relevant place theory within the festival context.

2.2. Mechanisms of place

Breaking down larger place constructs into component mechanisms, it can be seen that place bonding, rootedness to place, place dependence and place identity are regularly shown to contribute to a consumer's relationship with place. Additionally and common to all constructs is at least one mechanism focusing on an emotional attachment between person and place (Ramkissoon, Smith, & Weiler, 2013) – attachment will therefore be the starting point to explore environmental behavior.

Place attachment refers to affective and emotional relationships that individuals form with specific places (Kyle et al., 2005). These relationships endow physical places with emotional meaning and personal experience (Johnstone, 2012) and manifest as a strong tendency to maintain close bonds to specific, decommodified, singular places (Kleine & Menzel-Baker, 2004). These bonds form after interaction and become stronger as more time is spent in the same place (Lewicka, 2011). Developing a strong attachment to a place is thought to be beneficial for development of both individual and group characteristics and is linked to improving: place characteristics and activities (Gross & Brown, 2008), customer loyalty, intention to revisit, and overall destination satisfaction (Hwang, Lee, & Chen, 2005; Yuksel, Yuksel, & Yasin, 2010). Originally conceived as a dualistic construct, place attachment incorporates the symbolic dimension of identity – “a sub-structure of the self-identity of the person consisting of broadly conceived cognitions about the physical world” (Proshansky, Fabian, & Kaminoff, 1983; pg. 59) including “beliefs, perceptions or thoughts that the self is invested in a particular spatial setting” (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001, pg. 238). Integrated alongside identity is the functional dimension of dependence which “denotes the suitability of a place to satisfy one's functional needs and aims” (Suntikul & Jachna, 2016, pg. 276). However, despite wide acceptance, since place attachment's expansion across new disciplines (e.g. natural resource management, environmental education, hospitality and tourism management) a number of theoretical and methodological advancements have questioned this original dualism (Kyle et al., 2005).

Embracing advancements, the original dyad surrounding place attachment (i.e. emotion and function) has been replaced by a multi-faceted approach (Ram, Bjork, & Weidenfeld, 2016). Alongside identity and dependence, place affect (Hinds & Sparks, 2008), social bonding (Cheng & Kuo, 2015; Ramkissoon, Weiler, & Smith, 2012), and place climate (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001) have become accepted dimensions of place attachment. With increasing proposed mechanisms, place attachment has adapted to become a more structured construct. Engaging with this structure, theories suggest: place identity is the superior multi-dimensional mechanism, of which attachment is a dimension (Lalli, 1992); place identity and place attachment hold equal order as part of a larger mechanism (Hay, 1998), for example ‘place bonding’ (Cheng & Kuo, 2015); and place attachment and place identity are synonymous mechanisms (Brown & Werner, 1985). With literary inconsistencies

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