The making of the London Notting Hill Carnival festivalscape: Politics and power and the Notting Hill Carnival

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the role of politics and power in the Notting Hill Carnival's evolution from a community festival to a hallmark event and tourism product. It overcomes the limitations of previous event/festival tourism research by utilizing Actor Network Theory's conceptualization of power as an evolving, relational and trans-formational phenomenon to analyse the development of the Notting Hill Carnival's festivalscape. Findings reveal over its fifty-plus-year history, non-human actors (such as, money) and human actors (such as, organizing committees) have engaged in continuous, complex ordering processes that have led to the development of six distinct festival frames – Community Festival, Trinidad Carnival, Caribbean Carnival, Black Arts Festival, Business Opportunity and City-led Hallmark Festival. These changes have taken place within a festivalscape that includes objects, space, the translation process, pivotal events and dissenting actors. Within the festivalscape, political actors have exerted significant influence due to their asymmetrical power creating challenges for festival organizers.

1. Introduction

Traditionally, festivals were expressions of historical, social or cultural aspects of communities (Getz and Page, 2016) and they have remained central to the articulation of cultures (Gold and Gold, 2016). In contemporary societies, they are staged increasingly for their economic benefits. Festivals are critical to making cities more dynamic and liveable places (Richards, 2017). They increase leisure options for locals, attract new investment to an area, revitalize existing infrastructure and, in some cases, completely remodel a city's landscape.

Recent research continues to highlight that festivals staged for the benefit of tourists can lose their authenticity when they are distorted in pursuit of tourism goals (Overend, 2012). Whereas it is unfair to dismiss all manifestations of these of types of festivals as mere commercial pastiche, the tensions that result when local culture is used as part of tourism promotion are undeniable (Gibson and Connell, 2016).

The difficulties organizers and city officials have faced in balancing the interests involved when a festival is staged, both for the benefit of host communities and for the purposes of tourism, are well documented. It has been observed that contemporary festivals are spaces of conflict because of the opposing views of festival stakeholders (Todd et al., 2017) However, the literature has yet to explain how on-going conflicts and their resolution serve to develop and transform cultural celebrations, such as festivals, over time. The purpose of this paper is to examine the transformation process of a local community celebration which became an international hallmark event attracting tourists. It uses the Actor Network Theory (ANT) and takes a process approach to examine the activities, interactions and outcomes of festival actors in the London Notting Hill Carnival (LNHC), formerly known as the Notting Hill Carnival (NHC), for just over 50 years. It adapts Van der Duim's, 2007 tourismscape to develop a festivalscape for the LNHC to make three distinctive contributions to event/festival tourism literature. Firstly, it reveals overarching patterns in festival development, thus going beyond the conflict that dominates examinations of festival politics in event/festival tourism research. Secondly, it provides an examination of festival politics, which shows how asymmetrical power relations impact festival networks. Thirdly, it advances van der Duim's (2007) tourismscape by demonstrating the importance of pivotal events and dissenting actors for the LNHC's festivalscape.

2. Politics and power in event/festival tourism

This paper traces the development of a community festival into a hallmark international tourist event and, as such, is situated within the literature of festival/event tourism, which is described as a form of special interest travel in which attendees undertake a journey for the purposes of attending an event or festival (Getz 2008). A great deal of the literature on tourism-driven festivals/events is devoted to exploring

the politics and power relations which come from the unresolved tensions some festival/event sites embody on-going, unresolved tensions some festival/event sites embody (Browne, 2011; Laing and Mair, 2015; Markwell and Waitt, 2009). Politics and power relations are also central to research that examines the debates around the legitimacy of cultural expression from a community, which can result in an event or festival being excluded from a community's cultural narrative (Cornish, 2016).

Adapting a festival to incorporate tourists and commercial interests may reduce cultural expression to "a fetishized surplus value" (Nagle, 2005: 563) or gimmick used to sell ethnic products. For example, St. Patrick Day is an officially recognised Christian feast day in Ireland but in cities, such as New York and more lately London, these celebrations have become synonymous with drinking and with the Irish brand Guinness® (Nagle, 2008). Recent research has confirmed that festival commercialization through activities, such as the sale of souvenirs, local food and drink, are vital for tourist satisfaction (Kim, 2015). However, such associations can result in ambivalence among communities, needing the income that tourists and other commercial stakeholders bring into a festival, if they wish to preserve cultural authenticity. The adoption of sustainable development principles is critical if local communities are to avoid the commodification of indigenous festivals (Whitford and Dunn, 2014).

Organizers of tourism-driven festivals may purposely, or sometimes inadvertently, exclude socio-economic, ethnic or other groups (Clarke and Jepson, 2011; Quinn, 2010) even when they develop deliberate strategies of social inclusion. Usually these strategies are developed to engage visitors rather than residents, limiting the likelihood of inclusivity outcomes (Laing and Mair, 2015). Research has also demonstrated that when festivals/events display counter-cultures with their own distinct politics, there is frequently ambivalence about the festival's acceptance by the wider community. Funding for these events tends to come under public policy remits of inclusion or multi-culturalism, which are typically characterized by very narrow definitions of these constructs, thereby negating the potential for such initiatives to celebrate true cultural differences (Jackson, 1992; Markwell, 2002; Markwell and Waitt, 2009; Rushbrook, 2002).

Stakeholder analysis is a useful tool deployed within event/festival tourism literature to examine power and politics (Getz et al., 2006). These types of studies use Freeman's (1984) definition of stakeholders, which are groups or individuals that can be affected or affect an organization's purpose (Mitchell, Agle and Wood 1997 cited by Karlsen and Stenbacka Nordström, 2009). Karlsen and Stenbacka Nordström, 2009 used the International Marketing and Purchasing (IMP) framework of Activities and Resources to examine the interdependencies among stakeholders in festivals. Their findings suggested that the success of festivals was based on the adoption of stakeholder network management strategies classified as "long-stretched", "loose" and "glocal" network management strategies. Freire-Gibb and Lorentzen (2011) suggested festivals enable economic diversification by changing the pattern of stakeholder interactions at a location.

Yet another advancement in the examination of power and politics within event/festival tourism is Larson's (2002, 2009) work on festival networks and the relationship-building process, which viewed stakeholder interactions as a "political market square". Social Network Analysis (SNA) has been harnessed similarly to explore intra- and inter-festival network relationships (Jarman et al., 2014; Williams et al., 2017).

These perspectives are limited, however, since none of them explore the transformational aspects of politics and power relations. Their limitations lie in the way they conceive the politics and the resulting power relations in festivals. They are conceived either as a source of ongoing, unresolved tension (Browne, 2011; Laing and Mair, 2015; Markwell and Waitt, 2009) or as a phenomenon to be understood through classification of relationships (Larson, 2009; Williams et al., 2017). This is because power is seen as fixed, which overlooks its ever-changing, relational nature. Power in this paper, as in ANT research, is

conceived not as something that is fixed or possessed but is generated through persuasion (Munro, 2009). These persuasions or processes of alignment are what cause festivals and events to be transformed over time. This paper seeks to carry out an examination by utilizing ANT, which embraces the relational and transformational aspects of power relations.

3. Actor network theory

Whereas stakeholder analysis is focused on the classification of individuals/groups and SNA studies the social relations of individual human actors (Latour, 1996), ANT is concerned with how actors, both human and non-human, form networks, as well as how the actions of these actors lead to these networks falling apart and later reforming. Thus, an actor within ANT is anything or anyone whose activity leads to the formation or failure of a network. van der Duim (2007) specifically highlights three elements of ANT which may be useful for examining the evolution of tourism phenomena, such as festivals; these are the principle of symmetry, the importance of social spaces and the processes of translation.

3.1. Symmetry

Symmetry means that objects are equally as important as human actors. ANT proposes every situation is the result of ongoing associations among actors (Latour, 2005). When conducting ANT analysis, researchers have been cautioned to focus on the network rather than on individual entities, which allows identification of the role of objects, including hotels, airports and entertainment, making activities possible (Urry, 2002). The interplay of human and non-human actors, such as buses (Farías, 2010) and performing animals (Cloke and Perkins, 2005), is increasingly being studied in tourism to understand how experiences are staged for visitors.

3.2. Social spaces

The second feature of interest is at the core of how ANT conceptualises social spaces. A broader view has emerged that attempts to integrate the characteristics of travel and tourism that enable multiple evolving modalities of physical, social and mental space (Crouch, 2000). The meaning of these tourism spaces is constructed and reconstructed over time by mobilizing elements, such as actors, funding, information, brands and imagery (Sheller and Urry, 2004). Locations can be viewed as dynamic "tourismscapes" (van der Duim, 2007), in which visitors, suppliers, non-human actors, buildings and technological systems interact over time.

Thus, ANT is not merely a theoretical lens but also shapes the direction of inquiry (Law and Urry, 2004; Murdoch, 2006) as it encourages researchers to follow the process of how resources, tasks and meaning is assigned to actors, not merely the outcomes (Latour, 2005). One approach in the tourism domain has categorised this process as a "tourismscape" (Van der Duim, 2007). Spaces are developed within tourismscapes (Murdoch, 2006) linked to locations where activities are performed and can shape the process of relation-building and reconfiguration by actors. These spaces may be permanent, in the form of hotels or temporary, in the form of festivals (Zukin, 2010). In the latter, they can become a source of conflict since public and private actors may apply differing claims to a given space. These spaces may be real, such as beaches that tourists interact with (Ren, 2010), or imagined (Lengkeek, 2002), such as depictions in brochures.

3.3. Translation

The third element identified by van der Duim (2007) is translation (Latour, 1987). Translation follows phases rather than stages because distinction between states is not clear cut and progress is not a