Festival Literature: The Role of the Entrepreneur

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Abstract

Track: Different Contexts

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Aim of the Paper

The aim of this paper is to analyse studies on festivals and identify research gaps relevant to small business research. Festivals play a significant role in the lives of communities providing important activities and spending outlets for locals and visitors and enhancing the image of local communities (Getz 1993). Successful community-based festivals are growing in increasing numbers and concentrate on a range of particular interests (Getz, 2010). Despite this, researchers have been slow to consider contemporary festivals beyond either their economic impacts or the motivations of those who attend (Gursoy et al 2004). An area which has received little, if any attention from extant literature is that festivals are highly dependent on the driving forces of key individuals, often entrepreneurs, acting within festival networks which support their emergence and occurrence on a regular basis (Getz 1993; Getz et al 2010; Gursoy et al 2004).

This paper seeks to present a systematic review of research on festivals which spans 30 years, the purpose of which is to demonstrate that opportunities exist to research the role and impact of entrepreneurs and the networks in which they are embedded in the initiation and running of local, community-based festivals. Specifically we propose future research opportunities to investigate where the ideas for festivals originate, which individuals are involved, how these people interact and collaborate, what resources are required and, over time, how the network of relationships needed to make festivals happen evolve to support their annual occurrence.

Background Literature

The literature on festivals has been dominated by economic concerns, as well as operational and marketing issues (Robinson et al 2004). Festivals generate revenues for governments and local communities, support existing, and encourage new businesses (Dwyer et al 2005). Little, if any prior research has extended understanding of festivals beyond basic economic and tourism matters (Quinn 2009). How to classify festivals is difficult given both their geographic spread and the range of themes they celebrate. The focus of local, community-based festivals spans a diverse array of interests with eminent examples including books, music, food and film. Common however to most festivals are their strong tourism benefits and also their creativity. Prior research on festivals has demonstrated the positive impact which festivals can have on tourism, providing spending opportunities, attracting often significant additional money into local communities and regions and ultimately generating new employment opportunities (Crompton and McKay 1997; Kim et al 1998; Thrane 2002). Such research has also observed the wider, societal effects which local, community-based festivals can have, for example, on perceptions of place and locale (Getz 1997).

Methodology

This paper seeks to examine the depth and breadth of published research on festivals and adopts a systematic approach to the review presented (Victor 2008). The application of a systematic literature review for this study provided a method of "mapping areas of uncertainty, and identifying where little or no relevant research has been done, but where new studies are needed" (Petticrew and Roberts 2006: 2). Using definitions proposed by Uysal and Gitleson (1994) and Getz (1997), key terms were identified to establish our conceptual boundaries and to restrict the focus of our search. We used key search engines within the social sciences domain supplemented by using Google Scholar to identify most cited papers and to ensure these appeared in the literature review. No starting time period was allocated to include or exclude published research within the scope of this study but the cut-off date for inclusion was set at February 2013. Having identified a total of 57 articles from the process described, these papers were carefully read and coded by two researchers working independently. The researchers then compared emerging coding profiles, in some instances revisiting articles for recoding and validation of themes.

Results and Implications

A key focus of research in this area is the outcomes and successes of festivals, with economic impact receiving most attention (Crompton and Mackay 1997; Kim et al 1998). Other outcomes include their wider social, cultural and environmental contributions as well as the particular importance of festivals within local communities. Festivals have been conceived as providing and creating social ties within communities and, in this way, serve mechanisms for incentivising involvement by different community stakeholders.

A number of studies have emphasised the importance of understanding why people attend festivals arguing that only by developing an understanding of such motivations can organisers' effectively position and market festivals (Crompton and McKay 1997; Getz 1993). Building on work in the wider field of tourism, motivations have been studied in terms of the fulfilment of needs with various studies delineating these motivational factors with a suggestion that a core set of drivers for festival attendance exist.

A final key theme emerging from the literature analysed is that of festival management. Early work in this area regarded festivals as planned events and concentrated on generic management functions, examining festivals in terms of their feasibility, administration, design, marketing, operations and risk (Larsson 2002; Reilly 1994; Shrum 1991). Later work acknowledged the very particular context and characteristics of festivals that necessitates considering festivals within the wider environment in which they operate (Alves et al 2010; Edwards 2012).

This paper identifies research gaps and areas for further studies on festivals. Gaps of particular interest to entrepreneurship are the creation of festivals and the characteristics of their founders. The limited number of papers we found that made mention of the role of entrepreneurs in festival research all focused on entrepreneurs as participants at festivals (Engelbrecht et al 2011, Jonker et al 2009, Saayman et al 2008), with no research addressing the critical role of the entrepreneur in their initiation and continuance. Related to this, partnerships, networks and the role that key actors play in the establishment and success of festivals remain largely under explored. The limited work that has considered these wider networks has examined dyadic relationships rather than the network of relationships on which the establishment and success of festivals is reliant. Processes are largely ignored in the existing literature, despite the reality that festivals are, by and large, a repeated event. We argue that an understanding of the success and impact of festivals must be informed by pre-festival processes and also by post-festival reflections. Finally, we propose that place is an important construct to take into account.

We suggest that theoretical frameworks applied in entrepreneurship are useful lenses to aid understanding of these themes. In particular we identify network theories, the concept of embeddedness (Granovetter, 1985) and capital theory (Bourdieu, 1986) as relevant theoretical frameworks. Such theories and concepts have been applied to studies of entrepreneurs and have been revealing of the networks required to initiative and grow new ventures as well as the impact of context on supporting or restricting entrepreneurial behaviours and the resources needed to support entrepreneurial ventures. We also see parallels with the emerging literature on social entrepreneurship where the focus is on social goals (Shaw and Carter 2007) and the involvement of a number of different stakeholders (Di Domenico et al 2010) and community ventures where the goal of the venture and the resources needed to reach these goals are linked to a specific community (Haugh and Pardy 1999; Peredo and Chrisman 2006) that is geographically bounded.

Methodologically, research has been dominated by single case studies undertaken at one point in time. We suggest that future research will benefit by embracing longitudinal studies involving ethnographic approaches which can explore context both from temporal and community or locale perspective. This allows real-time study of emerging festival processes and seeks out actors within the phenomena (Davidsson 2003).

The recommendations for future research offered by this paper will help advance understanding of festival studies from an entrepreneurship perspective. In particular the paper contributes to the discourse on festival entrepreneurs, their roles, contributions and the processes involved.

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