

**Culture, Authenticity and Sport:
A Study of Event Motivations at the Ulaanbaatar Naadam Festival, Mongolia**

Karen Thompson and Catherine M Matheson

Introduction

The Naadam festival is the main focus of Mongolia's annual event calendar and one of the key attractions for visitors in the country's peak tourist season. Whilst the festival is principally a sporting event, a more complex series of motivations governs attendance for locals and overseas visitors alike. The sporting disciplines which are the focal point of the festival have their roots in longstanding cultural and spiritual traditions; thus, for Mongolians, sporting and cultural motivations for attending Naadam are closely associated. At the same time, Naadam is presented as an opportunity for overseas visitors to experience an authentic, local festival. For these visitors from outside Mongolia, cultural motivation appears to be a more significant motivating factor than the sporting events themselves. Indeed, the fact that the event is increasingly seen as an attraction for international tourists has led to some aspects of the event being adapted and perhaps commodified for tourism. Whether or not these modifications affect the sporting events themselves though, is open to discussion.

Drawing on the results of an empirical study, this chapter examines the case of the Ulaanbaatar Naadam within the framework of the literature on cultural authenticity and with reference to the contribution of sporting events and competitions to the latter. Differences between overseas and domestic markets attending the event are investigated and conclusions are drawn on the role of cultural authenticity in motivating visitors to attend the Naadam festival.

Naadam as an element of the Mongolian tourism product

In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the volume of cultural festivals and events taking place worldwide, following a growing recognition of their value in enhancing a destination's image and touristic appeal, improving leisure opportunities, contributing to local and regional economies and enhancing local pride and culture. Such events, as settings where hosts and guest can intermingle, are also effective in providing opportunities for enhancing relationships between the two groups. Furthermore, as noted by Long and Perdue (1990), the promotion of indigenous peoples and customs, which is stimulated by cultural festivals and events, contributes to sustainable destination development strategies; an approach which may be particularly relevant and effective for developing world destinations.

In Mongolia, Eriin Gurvan Naadam (The Festival of the Three Manly Sports) has become a cornerstone of the cultural tourism product. This traditional event is believed to date back at least two centuries, its origins being deeply embedded in the nomadic skills of war, defence and hunting – in other words celebrating the prowess of the male (Kabzińska-Stawarz 1987). However, the festival and its constituent sporting activities have also been linked to long-standing spiritual rites celebrating

and giving thanks for health and wealth and prosperity (Pegg 2001). Naadam is the highlight of the Mongolian sporting calendar and showcases the three traditional 'games of men'; wrestling, horseracing and archery. A series of Naadam festivals is held throughout Mongolia, in every province and county. The Ulaanbaatar Naadam is by far the largest of these, taking place in the national Naadam stadium, which holds around 35,000 people and is situated on the outskirts of the capital. The Ulaanbaatar Naadam takes place in mid-July on the anniversary of the foundation of the Mongolian state, which is a national holiday and coincides with the peak visitor season.

The degree to which any festival or event is successful in attracting visitors and providing them with a satisfactory experience depends on adequate knowledge of the underlying motivations for attending the festival, and consideration of the extent to which benefits sought are satisfied by the event itself. Thus, the analysis of visitor motivations for attending festivals such as Naadam as a basis for segmentation is an important prerequisite for the development of an effective marketing strategy (Kim et al. 2002). Moreover, an understanding of visitor motivations contributes to the planning and positioning of festivals and events (Crompton and McKay 1997) and to the identification of the strengths and opportunities of different market segments (Lee and Lee 2001). The Naadam festival attracts a domestic audience from across Mongolia and increasingly from overseas. Inbound tour operators include the Ulaanbaatar Naadam in their itineraries, marketing it as a unique and authentic cultural experience. Independent visitors to Mongolia are also well represented within the festival audience. However, the presence of these distinct groups raises questions about the range of motivations underpinning the attendance of the various market segments at the Naadam festival.

Culture as a motivator for event attendance

A growing body of literature has emerged around the study of events motivation. The contextual base for such studies has ranged from, for example, the single event festival case study (Chang 2006; Mohr et al. 1993), World Cultural Expo (Lee 2000; Lee et al. 2004) to comparative analysis between events (Nicholson and Pearce 2001). There is little doubt that the single event case study is dominant within empirical work. Li and Petrick (2006) suggest that a majority of the studies pertaining to festival and event motivation have employed travel motivation frameworks which have been theoretically based on the escape-seeking dichotomy and push-pull model. Event motives are multiple and it is evident that a number of dominant themes have emerged from event motivation studies which include cultural exploration, family togetherness, recover equilibrium, novelty, external group socialisation, event attractions, known group socialisation, gregariousness and festival participation and learning (Chang 2006; Crompton and McKay 1997; Lee 2000). In addition to the above and taking into consideration the characteristics of the Ulaanbaatar Naadam as a key sporting event, the growing body of literature on motivation for attending sporting competitions should also be acknowledged. Kim and Chalip (2004), in particular, have cast some light on motivations associated with fan interest (identifying with specific competitors) and the aesthetic appreciation of sport. Arguably, however, an understanding of and interest in the sporting events taking place is a prerequisite for the latter of these motivations.

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It is useful at this point to consider underlying motivations for attending the Naadam festival within the context of the above literature on events motivation. There can be little doubt that the standard of the sporting events and, in particular, the talents of the wrestlers attract a sizeable domestic audience from throughout Mongolia to observe the best competitors from all over the country. There is an enormous amount of prestige attached to winning the sports competitions and the champion wrestler is regarded as a national hero. However, the traditions underlying these sports are arguably equally important in attracting visitors to Naadam. Sportsmen compete in traditional costumes and the weight of history, nostalgia and theatre envelops the sporting events. In the wrestling competition, for example, heralds accompany the competitors on to the field and praise their sporting talents in song before some of the rounds. Important traditions are equally attached to the horseracing competitions, at the finish of which spectators crowd close to the horses to bathe in the dust of the Steppe and the sweat of the winning horses, which traditionally bring luck; time-honoured victory songs are sung to the winning horses and libation rituals are undertaken. The opportunity to observe and participate in these historic, indigenous traditions is clearly an attraction for visitors from overseas, but may also be a valuable way of reaffirming Mongolian identity and culture for the native audience, some of whom travel great distances to attend. However, the roles of culture and sport as prevailing motivators for attendance at the Naadam festival require further investigation.

Culture, authenticity and event motivation

The tourist desire to experience the authentic, in terms of cultural products and ways of life, is particularly significant to event motivation. A number of commentators have sought to address the theme of authenticity within events (Xie 2004; Raybould et al. 2000). In comparison to the tourism domain this is but an emerging theme. However, since MacCannell's (1973; 1976) theorisation of the quest for authenticity, it has run like an obligato within tourism studies. MacCannell argued that the tourists' alienation from modernity resulted in their quest for the authentic and real cultural experience. Drawing upon Goffman's (1959) description of 'front and back regions' in social establishments, MacCannell sought to outline structural divisions within the touristic experience. Tourist settings consisted of a continuum of front to backstage regions that comprised six stages, wherein the first stage was the front region that tourists endeavoured to get behind and the sixth stage was the backstage region of social space which motivated the touristic consciousness. However, it has been posited that the tourism commodification process destroys the authenticity of local cultural products and un-mediated human relations that the tourist desires, resulting in the 'staged authentic' (Cohen 1988).

Getz and Cheyne (2002: 142) contend that *'events provide tangible access to culture in ways that many built attractions cannot, especially through direct host-guest interaction. Accordingly, some tourists will seek out events in which cross-cultural contacts are high. Also, attending some events will entail the feeling of a 'must see', or 'once-in-a-lifetime authentic experience'*. Given that authenticity is said to motivate the touristic consciousness and also that cultural events are often bounded within the cultural traditions of place and can thereby represent authentic ways of life, this has potential implications for an understanding of the interlocking relationship between tourism, authenticity and events. Specifically, it can contribute to the

development of market segmentation approaches and the required strategies to develop repeat visitation for events.

Various studies have highlighted the role of authenticity within events motivation. Raybould et al.'s (2000) study on the Woodford Folk Festival (Queensland, Australia) identified the quest to experience the authentic and unique experience as the most highly ranked motivation dimension for attending the festival. This finding was unaffected by demographic and trip variables. However, searching for authentic experiences and escaping from other milieus was of greatest importance to frequent visitors to the festival. The authors suggest that the success of the festival potentially threatens the very authenticity which has motivated repeat visitors. In so doing, the authors echo MacCannell's (1976; 1973) claims relating to the issues of tourism commodification and the impact upon authenticity. A further study of the Spoleto Festival in Italy by Formica and Uysal (1998) revealed the relationship between culture and history to be the key attraction for the festival, highlighting the significance of the perceived cultural authenticity of the event. In addition, Chang's (2006) study of the Rukai aboriginal cultural festival employed cluster analysis to identify visitor groupings: 'Aboriginal cultural learner', 'change routine life travellers' and 'active culture explorers'. Chang argued that for tourists within the groupings 'Aboriginal cultural learners' and 'active culture explorers', promotional efforts should emphasize the authenticity and uniqueness of Aboriginal culture, as such groups were likely to be interested in experiencing backstage Aboriginal customs. These studies demonstrate not only that authenticity can be a motivating factor for visitors, but also that, by emphasising it within tourism marketing strategies, it can assist in the enhancement of market segmentation approaches and, moreover, contribute to the development of repeat visits to events.

Within the body of literature on sports and tourism, there have also been attempts to link the concepts of sport and culture as attractions for the tourist. It has been argued that sport can be considered a cultural attraction, not only because cultural programmes take place in association with large sporting events (Hinch and Higham 2004), but also because sports identities reflect the indigenous culture of a place (McConnell and Edwards 2000). As a result, attendance at or participation in local sporting events may be a means for the tourist to enter McCannell's backstage region of social space at the destination (Hinch and Higham 2005). Thus, for those visitors attending sports events, a destination's culture arguably becomes more accessible, in part because sport often acts as a symbol of a destination's culture, but also because the uncertainty of the outcome of sports events and competitions affords such events a greater level of authenticity (Hinch and Higham 2001). This link between culture and sport has been reinforced by Delpy Neirotti et al. (2001), whose study of motivations for attending the 1996 Olympic Games found that the cultural experience and the historical significance of the event were important factors in attracting people to the Games.

Consequently, a number of factors impinge upon event motivation. In addition to differences in motivation which are linked to the nature of the event itself, variation is also created by the characteristics of the events visitor. A number of studies have demonstrated differences between overseas and domestic event visitors. Lee's (2000) study of a Cultural Expo found statistically significant differences between domestic and overseas visitors in terms of five motivation factors: cultural exploration, novelty,

event attraction, external and known group socialisation. Such statistically significant differences indicate heterogeneity within event motivations. Funk and Bruun's (2007) study of the Gold Coast Airport Marathon was based on sports tourists who travelled internationally to participate in the event and thus offers a different insight into an understanding of event motivations from the perspective of participant, rather than spectator. Results indicated that the cultural background of participants had a significant impact relating to particular dimensions (i.e. cultural aspects, knowledge learning, and cultural experience). Participants from dissimilar cultures to Australia emphasised the importance of learning specific culture aspects and knowledge learning; generally, participants from dissimilar backgrounds rated experiencing cultural aspects higher than participants from similar backgrounds.

The above discussion provides a useful framework within which to investigate motivations for attending the Naadam festival, given its dual nature as a sporting and cultural event and the different geographical markets within its audience. The rest of the chapter sets out to explore the degree to which culture and sport related motivations were present among those attending the event, but also the extent to which the two types of motivation are interlinked and how they differ between domestic and overseas visitors. The extent to which the quest for cultural authenticity was fulfilled for each group was investigated.

Methods

An empirical investigation into motivations for attending the Ulanbaatar Naadam was undertaken by a team of researchers from University of Strathclyde, UK and Orkhon University, Ulanbaatar, using a mixed methods approach. Drawing on the literature reviewed above as an underpinning framework, an interview completed questionnaire was designed which was administered to visitors attending the Ulanbaatar Naadam in July 2005. Motivation for attending the event was measured by a scale of 27 attributes thought to contribute to overall motivation. The Cronbach's Alpha value for the scale of 0.89 suggests that there is internal consistency within the scale (de Vaus 1996). For each of the attributes in the scale, subjects were asked to rate their level of agreement / disagreement with each statement on a seven point Likert-type scale. Further sections of the questionnaire requested details of respondents' stay in Ulanbaatar and their levels of satisfaction with certain aspects of the Naadam Festival. Several open-ended questions gathered textual data on the experiences of those attending the festival, including their particular likes and dislikes. The response rate for these questions was enhanced by the fact that the questionnaires were completed by interviewers. The final section of the questionnaire gathered demographic information on respondents.

Undertaking a pilot study was unrealistic, given the short duration of the event, however the questionnaire was subjected to a test of face validity with the cooperation of a number of inbound tour operators, festival organizers and tourism experts in Mongolia. The principal survey site was the main Naadam stadium, with interviews also undertaken in the archery stadium and at the horse-racing venue. International visitors were targeted by researchers with English as their first language whilst a team of Mongolian-speaking researchers collected data from domestic visitors. In total, a sample of 539 useable questionnaires was obtained using non-random convenience

sampling, of which 34 percent were international visitors and 66 percent Mongolian nationals.

Findings

In order to establish the importance of cultural and sporting motivators in attendance at Naadam, average ratings on the motivation variables were examined for all respondents (Table 1). Variables related to culture in general score higher than the sports related variables, with the top two variables relating specifically to Mongolian culture. The findings suggest that culture is the predominant underlying motivation for attending Naadam, and is in line with findings of previous research on cultural festivals. At the same time, it reflects the findings of Delpy Nierotti et al., (2001) that the cultural experience of sports events is an important motivation for attending. The uniqueness of the cultural product at the Naadam festival is likely to strengthen the importance of culture as a motivator for attendance.

TABLE 1 NEAR HERE

In order to investigate differences between overseas and domestic visitors on the motivation variables, a series of t-tests was run on the variables in Table 1. A number of statistically significant differences were found, which cast further light on the roles of culture and sport in stimulating attendance at the event.

Of the three highest rated variables in Table 1 relating to cultural motivation, scores on the third only (*'I enjoy cultural experiences'*) were related to the geographical origin of the visitors. There was no difference between the ratings of Mongolian and overseas visitors on the other two variables, relating specifically to Mongolian culture. At the same time, statistically significant differences were shown to exist on the variables relating to sports motivators. The results of the t-tests can be found in Table 2.

TABLE 2 NEAR HERE

For the case of the motivation variables related to sport, all without exception were rated significantly higher by domestic visitors attending the festival, thus reaffirming the importance of the sports competitions as the *raison d'être* of the festival and an important motivator for Mongolians to attend. By contrast, it is clear from the findings that experiencing and learning about Mongolian culture are as important to the indigenous population as they are to the tourist. Other aspects of cultural motivation, however, can be differentiated between the two visitor groups, namely those relating to more generic cultural motivations, such as an interest in local events and cultural experiences. In summary, the data in Table 2 appears to show that variables drawn from the literature on attendance at sporting events (Kim and Chalip 2004) are considerably more important for the local population than for tourists. The indigenous cultural dimension of Naadam, however, is appreciated by both overseas

and domestic visitors and acts as major motivating factor for both groups.

In order to investigate the link between the motivation variables relating to sport and culture as motivators for attending Naadam, correlation coefficients were calculated showing the strength of the relationships between the variables in Table 1. Correlations were calculated separately for the two geographical markets within the sample in order to gain an overview of any differences between Mongolian respondents and those from overseas. Whilst correlations were strongest within the group of sports related variables (providing support for the construct validity of the measurement scale), correlations significant at the 0.01 level, albeit of lesser magnitude, were found to exist between all sports and culture variables for the Mongolian sample. Such findings indicate that the sporting competitions which take place during Naadam may be perceived to represent a fundamental link with Mongolian culture and tradition, and a means for Mongolians to affirm their national identity. This link between culture and sport for the Mongolian market merits further exploration.

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By contrast, for the sample of overseas visitors, the picture was rather different. Not all of the correlations between sports and culture variables were found to be significant and those which were significant show only a very weak relationship between the variables. However, between the variables within the culture and sports sets respectively, correlations appear marginally higher than was the case for Mongolian visitors. The implication is that there is a greater division between groups within the overseas market with regard to those attending for cultural reasons, and those motivated by the sporting aspects of the festival. Meanwhile, for Mongolian visitors, the two types of motivation are more closely related, a fact which perhaps provides evidence for Hinch and Higham's (2001; 2005) assertion that sports events serve to enhance the authenticity of an attraction or event, and also arguably substantiates the authenticity of the Naadam festival.

In addition to the above examination of event motivations, perceptions of the event - and specifically the differences between domestic and overseas visitor event likes and dislikes - were also examined. Tables 3 and 4 illustrate the key attributes of the event which visitors like and highlight the differences between the groups. Domestic visitors identified the primary attributes of the event as the specific sporting events (especially horse-racing and wrestling). Indeed, the specific sporting events accounted for over 80 per cent of the key elements for the event. That this was the case can be attributed to the fact the event is bounded within Mongolian culture and thereby offers its local community an opportunity to celebrate and affirm their local culture.

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By contrast, although the sporting events were a key consideration for the overseas visitor (39 per cent) they did not have an equivalent level of importance. Given that such sporting events are bounded within the local cultural tradition, they may not have the same resonance for the overseas visitor. Rather, the Mongolian cultural experience, in terms of the performance of Mongolian culture, tradition and the experience for the tourist, were important. Intertwined with the aforesaid, the authenticity and uniqueness of the event was valued by the overseas visitor. Social aspects of the event were valued more highly than by the domestic visitor.

The implication of the importance attached to the culture, authenticity and sociability

aspects is that the cultural and authentic experience, both event product and experience, is sought after by the overseas visitor. In itself the event is not a 'staged' representation of culture that offers its participants a 'staged authentic' event, but instead proffers the visitor, both domestic and overseas, an insight into the authentic Mongolian culture and the backstage region of social space. This relates to the fact the event is not an 'invented tradition' (Hobsbawm 1983) for the tourist market, but rather has survived for over 200 years in traditional form. The cultural authenticity of the event is further augmented by the incorporation of aspects of Mongolian tradition, for example, traditional costume and victory songs.

TABLES 3 AND 4 NEAR HERE

With regard to the facets of the event which visitors disliked, there were key differences between the domestic and overseas visitor (Tables 5 and 6). The former group identified the physical, environmental (chaos and crowding, rubbish) and social (presence of alcoholics; crime and visitor behaviour) impacts of the event. They also noted individual sporting events within the festival. This contrasts with the high proportion of domestic event visitors identifying individual sporting events as features of the event which they did like and would indicate the presence of a minority whose attendance at the festival is motivated by factors other than sport, such as the event's significance within Mongolian cultural identity. Just over a tenth of the domestic visitors did not dislike anything about the event. The latter group identified the event organization and health and safety issues as being key issues. The Mongolian climate and the crowds at the event were also identified. It is noteworthy that an aspect of the event which overseas visitors disliked was the presence of other tourists. While this is a minority issue, it indicates that the tourism commodification process has impacted upon the experience.

These factors highlight a number of over-arching themes of the event and its commercialization. Individual factors such as crowding and, as noted by overseas visitors, the presence of tourists, highlight the commercialization of the event. The physical, social and environmental issues associated with the event can largely be addressed within the event's production. Indeed, failure to address these issues could have an adverse impact upon the longevity of the event and, in effect, limit the visitors' experience of authentic Mongolian culture which is clearly so significant to domestic and overseas visitors alike.

TABLES 5 AND 6 NEAR HERE

Conclusion

In summary, the findings above provide a useful insight into the fundamental reasons for the two groups in the sample attending the Naadam festival, as well as an overview of the key themes with regard to specific likes and dislikes. For Mongolians attending the festival, the importance of both culture and sport and the relationship demonstrated between the two sets of motivations reflects the importance of Naadam and its sporting events as a representation of Mongolian identity and a celebration of

indigenous culture. For overseas visitors, the sporting competitions equally present an opportunity to experience Mongolian culture and traditions, and the festival is valued more greatly from this perspective than for its merit as an élite national sporting event. This research provides an insight into the traditions and representations of Mongolian culture and, furthermore, into the importance attached to the cultural authenticity of the event by domestic and overseas visitors alike. In so doing, this provides an avenue for the development of a market segmentation approach based on the requirements and motivations of domestic and overseas visitors. However, the research should be viewed as exploratory. There is clearly scope for further, more detailed investigation of the authenticity of the event from the visitor perspective and the degree to which commodification and touristification is influencing the satisfaction levels of both Mongolian and overseas visitors, an area which this chapter has only touched on.

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Table 1 - Mean scores on culture and sport motivation variables (all respondents)

| Motivation attribute | N | Mean | |
|--|-----------|-----------|------------|
| | Statistic | Statistic | Std. Error |
| I wish to learn more about Mongolian culture | 515 | 5.88 | .053 |
| I want to experience Mongolian culture | 518 | 5.87 | .052 |
| I enjoy cultural experiences | 508 | 5.70 | .056 |
| I admire the talents of the sports competitors | 522 | 5.70 | .059 |
| I enjoy experiencing culture in its unique, historical setting | 512 | 5.68 | .058 |
| I would like my family to learn more about Mongolian culture | 509 | 5.61 | .060 |
| I enjoy sports events | 512 | 5.51 | .065 |
| I like to experience local customs and cultures | 500 | 5.43 | .064 |
| I am interested in local events | 515 | 5.37 | .059 |
| I am a keen sports fan | 508 | 4.88 | .074 |
| I am supporting certain competitors | 504 | 4.66 | .091 |
| I know people who are competing in the sporting events | 486 | 4.37 | .095 |

Table 2 - Mean differences between motivations of overseas tourists and Mongolians attending Naadam Festival

| Motivation attribute | Mean | | T-value | Sig (2 tailed) |
|--|------|-----------|---------|----------------|
| | OSV | Mongolian | | |
| I wish to learn more about Mongolian culture | 5.89 | 5.88 | -.168 | .867 |
| I want to experience Mongolian culture | 6.00 | 5.81 | -1.907 | .057 |
| I enjoy cultural experiences | 6.03 | 5.54 | -4.720 | .000 |
| I admire the talents of the sports competitors | 5.20 | 5.95 | 6.260 | .000 |
| I enjoy experiencing culture in its unique, historical setting | 5.81 | 5.62 | -1.723 | 0.86 |
| I would like my family to learn more about Mongolian culture | 5.01 | 5.91 | 7.422 | .000 |
| I enjoy sports events | 4.87 | 5.84 | 6.921 | .000 |
| I like to experience local customs and cultures | 5.82 | 5.21 | -5.161 | .000 |
| I am interested in local events | 5.60 | 5.24 | -3.138 | .002 |
| I am a keen sports fan | 4.34 | 5.17 | 5.283 | .000 |
| I am supporting certain competitors | 2.95 | 5.49 | 16.098 | .000 |
| I know people who are competing in the sporting events | 2.60 | 5.27 | 15.874 | .000 |

Table 3 - Overseas Event Visitors: Likes

| Overseas Event Visitors: Likes | Percentage |
|--|-------------------|
| Sporting and other events | 39 |
| Mongolian cultural experience | 26 |
| Social experience | 20 |
| Uniqueness and authenticity of the event | 15 |

Table 4 – Domestic Event Visitors: Likes

| Domestic Event Visitors: Likes | Percentage |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Wrestling | 36.2 |
| Horse racing | 34.4 |
| Archery | 6.6 |
| Opening ceremony | 6.2 |
| Other sporting events | 4.6 |
| Tradition and event | 3.8 |
| Social experience | 3.8 |
| Event organization and amenities | 3.2 |
| Miscellaneous | 1.2 |

Table 5 - Overseas Event Visitors: Dislikes

| Overseas Event Visitors: Dislikes | Percentage |
|--|-------------------|
| Event organization and amenities | 23.21 |
| Health and safety | 15.23 |
| Heat | 14.28 |
| Crowds | 13.39 |
| Specific events | 10.71 |
| Tourists | 8.9 |
| Commercialisation | 5.35 |
| Miscellaneous | 8.93 |
| | |

Table 6 - Domestic Event Visitor: Dislikes

| Domestic Event Visitor: Dislikes | Percentage |
|---|-------------------|
| Rubbish and pollution | 17.54 |
| Event organization and amenities | 15.89 |
| Chaos and crowding | 14.56 |
| Sporting events | 12.58 |
| Nothing | 11.25 |
| Crime and visitor behaviour | 8.27 |
| Alcoholics | 7.94 |
| Miscellaneous | 8.6 |
| Commercialisation | 3.3 |