

Literature Review Floris Langen and Beatriz García

Measuring the impact of major cultural events: a literature review

Scope and approach

This review assesses the available literature dedicated to measuring the impacts of major cultural events and festivals. It is not so much concerned with the outcomes of these studies as with a discussion of the methodologies used. For this reason, commentaries on the use of cultural events in the context of city marketing or urban regeneration (e.g. **Evans 2003**) or more conceptual studies (e.g. **Quinn 2006**, on the role of festivals in sustainable development) have not been taken into account, unless they included a discussion or example about how to measure impacts.

As the objective of the review was to assess studies on the impacts of *major cultural events and festivals*, studies on single small-scale events such as concerts or performances (e.g. **Gazel and Schwer 1997**) or the impacts of (parts of) the cultural sector as a whole (e.g. **Travers 1998**) were not taken into account. Sporting events were excluded from the search as well, unless the focus of the study was on a specific cultural component of their programme.

However, as the concept of 'major events' was found to be somewhat ambiguous, it was decided to focus the initial search on *all festivals and events*, ranging from small community festivals to mega events such as the World Expo. As one of the objectives of the study was to see in what way the concept of impact was defined in the various studies, it was also decided not to attempt any definition at the start of the review (definitions of impact is discussed extensively in **Reeves 2002**).

This review does not claim to be exhaustive, but aims to give a general overview of the scope of studies and the preferences in research topics and methodological approaches. The main focus is on research undertaken in the UK, but relevant studies from the EU and the rest of the English speaking world are included as well. The temporal focus is on

studies produced over the last 15 years, giving equal consideration to academic literature, and practitioner, consultancy or policy-based literature

A total of 101 research publications were identified, which were then grouped according to event typology. Over half of the publications focused on '*small-scale festivals*' dedicated to respective local communities. A quarter were dedicated to '*Mega-events*', which are characterised by their one-off nature and their scale – attracting the largest range of participants and media coverage. Thirteen studies centred on *major cultural festivals*. These are mostly multi-annual events with an international reputation, built over a period of time. Finally, 17 studies had no clear focus on any one type of event. Half of these were sectoral studies, such as surveys on the economic impact of the British festival sector (**Allen and Shaw 2000, 2002**; **Sam and University of Brighton 2008**) or specific regions (**Maughan and Bianchini 2004**). The rest were concerned with methodological issues, but did not connect this to any specific typology of event. Overall, most studies with a focus on methodology were found in the context of small event studies. This review focuses on the literature on cultural mega events and major cultural festivals as well as the European Capital of Culture title, which could be considered a hybrid between the two.

Measuring the impacts of major and mega events

Major cultural festivals

Studies of the impacts of major cultural festivals mostly take the form of event evaluations carried out for organisers or funding bodies, with a primary focus on assessing the economic benefits of the event. The most common approach in these evaluations is to carry out an analysis of visitor expenditure data in order to determine the direct, indirect and induced contribution of the event to the local or

regional economy (**Brookes and Landry 2002**; **London Development Agency 2003**; **SQW Ltd and TNS Travel and Tourism 2005**; **Jura Consultants 2006**). Data is usually collected from various sources, such as visitor surveys, box office data, and stakeholder interviews.

Baker Associates (2007), in an assessment of the economic impacts of the Glastonbury Festival, expand on this approach by also taking into account less quantifiable economic impacts, such as trading opportunities for not-for-profit organisations and the contribution of the festival to local entrepreneurial culture. Data for this was gathered mainly through stakeholder interviews.

Snowball and Willis (2002) form a clear exception to this approach. In their (academic) study they apply Choice Experiments (CE) to value the utility visitors derive from various sections of the South African National Arts Festival, arguing that this methodology is particularly useful for estimating benefits of the various aspects of the festival and how these are differently valued by the audience.

Some of the studies mentioned above do in fact identify the need for additional research on the social impacts of events (e.g. **London Development Agency 2003**). Some other studies claim to be assessing local impacts that go beyond the economic kind, but in practice devote the majority of their time to the assessment of the local economic benefits, with only limited methodological underpinning of their statements on social impacts. For instance, an evaluation of the Ghent Festivities by the **Centre for Tourism Policy Studies (2003)** claims to assess not only the economic impacts of the event, but also its physical, functional, social and cultural effects; in reality, however, it is concerned primarily with quantifiable economic benefits. The same goes for an evaluation of the 'economic and cultural impact' of the Brighton

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Festival by **Sussex Arts Marketing** (2004).

Jura Consultants, in their report on the Pillar Events in Manchester, note a major research gap in understanding the indirect impacts of major events upon host communities, and point out that the intangible or less easily measured outcomes or outputs are 'often ignored or poorly dealt with' (**Jura Consultants 2006**). They argue for the use of focus groups 'to develop understanding of cultural networks and impacts on industry and the effect on audiences, etc', and furthermore suggest that such impacts are probably best studied through a longitudinal, multi-year approach.

Examples of impact assessments that attempt to include not only economic, but other impacts as well, are found in studies by **Morris Hargreaves McIntyre and Arts About Manchester** (2008), who evaluated the achievements of the Manchester International Festival against its set aims, objectives and targets, which included certain social impacts; and **Mason and Beaumont-Kerridge** (2004), who carried out a study of visitor and residents' attitudes towards the economic, sociocultural, environmental and political (community) impacts of the Sidmouth International Festival, using visitor surveys and focus groups with local residents during and after the festival. The latter study contains a large discussion of earlier studies, and concludes that 'the majority of festival research has tended to ignore or at least play down the other impacts that can be classified under the headings of environmental, sociocultural or political'.

Another attempt to develop a more comprehensive approach to measuring the impacts of major festivals is found in the work of **Carlsen et al.** (2007), who explicitly call upon other festival researchers to 'move beyond economic impacts in order to understand the complex and comprehensive set of benefits and disbenefits associated with festivals'. Writing on the Edinburgh Festivals, they argue that no real systematic research has been done into the cultural, community and social benefits (*sic*) of major festivals (in general), and point at the limitations of

focusing on more narrow economic outcomes, such as comparability, reliability, and utility of estimates. Instead, they propose an 'inclusive research agenda for the Edinburgh Festivals which looks at the benefits of the festivals for the arts, culture, community, economy, society, and stakeholders'.

While all the above studies are concerned, in a lesser or higher degree, with measurements of economic impact, only two studies were found that paid no attention to this whatsoever. **Snowball and Webb** (2008) examines the value of the National Arts Festival of South Africa in the country's transition to democracy, presenting the festival as an arena for the expression of political resistance. They have carried out a historical, qualitative study, which considers not only how the festival served as an outlet for the expression of political and social resistance, but also its role in maintaining and producing national cultural capital. As such, this study is primarily concerned with social and cultural impacts. The same can be said for **Pattison** (2006), who discusses how Edinburgh has profited both socially and culturally from its festivals. This publication is based primarily on semi-structured interviews and focus groups with key stakeholders, and presented in the context of a discussion on urban regeneration.

Cultural 'mega' events

Most studies on the impacts of Mega events have focused on sporting events, such as the Olympic Games or various World Cup events. This area has been dominated by assessments of the economic impacts of these events.

The number of studies looking at cultural mega events is far smaller. One cultural Mega event that has attracted a fair amount of attention has been the World's Fair or Expo. The five studies found on this subject take a number of approaches to measuring different kinds of impact. A study by **Dimanche** (1996) on the long-term legacy of the Louisiana Expo of 1984 is probably the most-often cited study on the subject. Although primarily concerned with economic impacts, Dimanche attempts to measure the impacts of the event in a number of areas, including tourism, the community and the physical

infrastructure. Crucial to this study is that it is one of the first to employ a longitudinal approach. While most economic impact study measure short-term economic benefits, Dimanche argues that a long-term approach is better suited to measure the benefits of mega events like the Expo, since events of this type often require very large initial investments which are likely to negatively influence the local economy in the short term but can reap benefits after five to ten years.

Holmes and Shamsuddin (1997) also take a longitudinal approach in their evaluation of the effects of the 1986 Expo on demand for tourism in British Columbia. Their methodology is based on multivariate statistical models, time series analysis and consumer demand theory, and makes use of visits made from the US to British Columbia as indicators of the long-term tourism impacts of the event.

Two publications have measured residents' perception of the impacts of major cultural events in Korea. **Jeong and Faulkner** (1996) measured the positive and negative perceptions of the 1993 Taejon Expo one year after the event, in order to examine the extent to which the benefits and costs associated with the event impinge upon the immediate community. They argue for the importance of measuring residents' perceptions, as the question of measuring impact is not so much whether or not benefits outweigh the costs, but who benefits and who bears the costs. According to them this is especially important in the case of mega events, which can have a profound impact on the lives of the resident population due to their scale. In a more recent study, **Lim and Lee** (2006) have attempted a comparative analysis of the same event with the Gyeongju Biennale, assessing the community's perceptions of the socio-economic impacts of both events after the lapse of some time. Their long-term approach builds on social exchange theory and the concept of 'willingness to cooperate'. The starting assumption of the study was that community members will evaluate events as either positive or negative in terms of expected benefits/costs deriving from the services they supply.

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A study on Expo 1998, by **Edwards et al. (2004)**, makes use of in-depth semi-structured interviews, supplemented by a review of general and academic literature, to establish the event's tourism impacts as perceived by a number of key players in Lisbon's tourism industry. They find a number of positive impacts that are believed to be related to the hosting of the event, such as more efficiency in tourism promotion and an increase in self-confidence and belief in abilities, but stress that this is only a preliminary study, and that more (longitudinal) work is required.

Another mega event that has been studied in a number of publications is the MTV Awards ceremony of 2003, held in Edinburgh. **SQW (2004)** considered the economic benefits of the event for the local economy, focusing on measuring new or additional expenditure generated as a result of the increase in demand stimulated by the event. Data for this analysis was collected through desk research, face-to-face interviews, and a wider consultation programme including telephone interviews.

Reid (2006) discusses how the possible use of the MTV Awards as a vehicle to re-brand Edinburgh as a 'young' tourist destination was an important element in the political rationale to host it. He points out that while the economic benefits of the event were apparent, as shown in the report by SQW, the indirect benefits of being able to 'showcase' Edinburgh and Scotland were the most appealing to public officials. However, this study does not attempt any measurement of the events' impact on image or tourism. In another study on the subject, **Reid (2007)** addresses community involvement in the event. He argues that while political rhetoric spoke of extensive local involvement, this in fact remained rather marginal. This study was based on semi-structured interviews with key public events organisers, telephone interviews with representatives of MTV, local press and the Scottish pop industry, as well as a content analysis of local and national newspaper reporting and national television coverage. One shortcoming of the research, however, is that it does not examine the thoughts of local young people, as Reid acknowledges.

A small number of studies have looked at

cultural events that have been directly related to Mega sporting events, the two main examples being the cultural programmes taking place in context of the Olympic Games and the Commonwealth Games. In contrast to the sporting events themselves, however, these cultural festivals and events have received little attention. For instance, the benefits study of the Manchester 2002 Commonwealth Games (**FaberMaunsel et al. 2004**), which assesses the direct economic, social and regeneration impacts of this Mega sporting event, made only a brief reference to 'Cultureshock', the cultural programme that had been developed in conjunction with the Games. However, this programme itself was the subject of two separate studies

Andrews (2003) evaluated the programme's impact on cultural organisations, audiences, city and region, looking primarily at short-term effects, although some talk of legacy for organisations. The evaluation based its findings on a series of qualitative interviews with key representatives from organisations, venues and projects involved in the programme, questionnaires completed by attenders and non-attenders, and a critical review of monitoring forms. The study assessed the outcomes against the aims and objectives identified by the Cultureshock organization. Although the study sets out to evaluate the programme's 'impact', it primarily serves to assess its 'performance'. In terms of impacts, it addresses social changes at the personal and organisational level, such as better understanding of cultural differences, new and positive experiences for the audience, and personal and organisational learning. In the evaluation by **Garcia (2003)** the focus is on assessing the cultural programme's structure of management and design rationale, and its ability to respond to defined aims in terms of community (and diversity of) engagement. The evaluation also assesses the programme's impact on audience development, levels of investment and art-form development within the region, by contrast to the sporting programme. The methodologies are mainly qualitative, focusing on stakeholder interviews, focus groups and participatory mapping techniques with young event participants.

While the Olympic Games have been the subject of many impact studies, the Olympic Arts Festivals, the cultural component of the Games, have received very little attention, with only two publications found on this subject. **Popma (2004)**, writing in the context of the preparations for the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver, makes an assessment of the potential impact of the Cultural Olympiad and the Olympic Arts Festival on the host community of the area, and the potential benefits for the local cultural sector. This assessment is based on a 'lessons learned' approach, building on a review of existing documentation and literature on previous Olympic arts events and other Hallmark events on local arts and culture, as well as interviews. **Garcia (2001)** assesses the marketing impact of the Sydney 2000 Olympic Arts Festivals by reporting on a four-year study of media clippings. This paper concludes that the arts programme was marginal to the mainstream promotion of the Olympic Games and was thus perceived as a separate programme, which limited its impact amongst Olympic audiences. Other studies by Garcia on the Olympic cultural programme focus on policy and management issues but do not discuss methodologies for impact assessment.

European Capitals of Culture

The European Capital of Culture (ECOC) takes up a space in between one-off cultural Mega events such as the World Expo and more conventional major cultural festivals as discussed above. On the one hand, in terms of programmatic elements, it can be very similar to large scale international cultural festivals, but it certainly has the potential to be a 'Mega' event in sheer terms of scale. Further, the title is awarded once to each city, which makes it a one-off event, although an event that can take place over the course of one full year.

The ECOC is generally regarded to play a key role in enhancing image, attracting tourists, and stimulating urban regeneration (see e.g. **Balsas 2004** on city centre regeneration in the context of Porto 2001), but not many attempts have been made to measure the impact of the events themselves. A key publication on the subject, by **Palmer/Rae Associates (2004)**,

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reviews the impact of 29 cities that held the title of ECoC between 1995 and 2004, and aims to examine their long-term legacies through interviews and online questionnaires completed by organisers from each city and an analysis of publicised materials. The study argues that the ECoC title is seen as a powerful tool for cultural development, but that not enough attention has been paid to ensuring its role as catalyst for sustainable change, in terms of social and economic improvements. It emphasises that more attention should be paid to ensuring long-term gains, although it does not specifically discuss the measurement of such a legacy.

Some attempts to do so have been made in various publications on specific ECoCs. **Richards and Wilson (2004)** have evaluated the impact of the ECoC status on the image of the city of Rotterdam. They employed a survey of resident and non-resident visitors to measure the short-term effects, while in-depth interviews with policy-makers and cultural managers were used to assess longer-term effects. One of their observations is that very little attention has been paid to the image-effects of cultural events. One study that does examine the effect of the ECoC designation on the image of a city is by **Garcia (2005)**, which specifically evaluates the success of the event as a model for culture-led regeneration, and argues that the effect of local image and identity is the most important long-term legacy of Glasgow's year as ECoC in 1990. This study specifically looks at often-dismissed 'soft indicators', such as media and personal discourses, and uses a multi-method approach based on a longitudinal analysis of press content analysis, face-to-face interviews, a small scale survey, and focus groups with representatives of cultural/political/business groups. A similar kind of study has been carried out by **Garcia (2006)**, which uses a longitudinal analysis of national press coverage to analyse the first indications of the impact of winning the ECoC title on the external image (representations) of the city of Liverpool.

A study by **Hughes, Allen and Wasik (2003)** uses semi-structured interviews with key players in the local tourism and

culture sectors to assess the perceived effects of the ECoC designation on the city of Krakow on local tourism and cultural life. The authors note that the study was not so much concerned with 'the actual impact in terms of measurable or quantifiable outcomes', but argue that it is relevant to measure people's perceptions, even if these may be distorted, as they influence their attitudes and behaviour.

However, as was the case for other events, the majority of studies on ECoC have focused on economic impacts. **Richards (2000)**, although not concerned with the direct assessment of any specific event, uses desk research on previous ECoCs to analyse the extent to which these events were successful in stimulating economic development. His study finds much evidence of short-term increases in visitor numbers and spending, but remains inconclusive on longer term benefits. One study that is particularly concerned with short-term economic impacts is **Herrero et al (2006)**. This uses a measurement of direct expenses, indirect expenses and induced effects to estimate the short-term economic impact of Salamanca 2002. The only publication found that makes a pre-event assessment of possible economic impacts of an ECoC is a study by **ERM (2003)** on Liverpool 2008, although this also attempts to assess possible social and cultural impacts.

Apart from this last assessment, the 2008 ECoC has attracted a much larger number of studies in the context of the 'Impacts 08' project, which is the most extensive programme of research to measure the various impacts of any ECoC to date. **Impacts 08 (2007a)** provides the baseline against which the social, economic, cultural and environmental impacts of Liverpool's ECoC programme are to be measured, and describes the development of a longitudinal model for cultural impact assessment. A wide range of aspects is taken into account, including (1) economic impacts and processes; (2) the city's cultural system; (3) cultural access and participation; (4) identity, image and place; (5) physical infrastructure and sustainability; and (6) the philosophy and management of the process. The programme takes a longitudinal approach to measuring the various impacts of

Liverpool's year as ECoC, with a starting point in 2000, well before the announcement of the event, and is set to continue until March 2010. It offers an annual update of benchmark indicators across all the themes listed above (**Impacts 08 2007b**) and the update of 'core' messages summarising key economic, cultural, social and environmental impacts in the lead-up and during 2008 (**2007c**).

Economic outputs of Impacts 08 so far include work by **Sapsford and Southern (2007)**, which sets the baseline on which to measure changes in the sub-regional economy, and a number of follow-up studies on smaller sections of the local and regional economy. **Pythian-Adams et al., (2008)** assess the impact of the ECoC designation on local and regional business, through a postal survey of local and regional business enterprises, with a focus on changes in generating sales and employment. **Base Line (2008)** measures the strength of the local and regional business sector and how this is affected by Liverpool's ECoC status and activities. This study, which is based on in-depth interviews with a range of key informants and business representatives, specifically addresses the relationship between SME's within the city's visitor economy and the city's status as ECoC 2008, but also assesses other elements, such as business opportunities and business attitudes to and knowledge of Liverpool's cultural system. Another study (**Impacts 08 2008**) uses semi- and unstructured one-to-one interviews with the city's developer market to assess the sector's strength and how this is affected by the ECoC status and activities. . Other published Impacts 08 research to date considers social and cultural impacts on local narratives of the city (**Melville et al. 2007**), impacts on media representation (**Garcia 2006**) and impacts on stakeholder engagement and relationships (**O'Brien 2008**).

Finally, a specific economic impact study has been carried out by **Martins and Serra (2007)**. In their working paper, they analyse the impact of a large number of international sporting and cultural events, including 30 European Capitals, 11 world Expos and 10 specialised exhibitions, on the stock markets of their host countries, by analysing abnormal stock market

returns around the dates on which announcements were made of the winners of bids to host these events.

Concluding remarks: Main trends in major cultural event impact assessment

Overall, the most common trends within the reviewed literature point to the following

- Most cultural event research is based on stakeholder interviews, complemented by documentary reviews
- Specific discussion of methodological issues and development of measuring tools mainly takes place in context of small event studies, which have not been included in this review.
- Studies on major festivals are the least concerned with methodological questions and the least linked with academic research. This may be partly due to the fact that most commissioners or research on this area are primarily concerned with positive short-term effects, which tend to dominate in the available literature.
- The main research gap noted in report recommendations is the lack of attention to long-term impacts. However, many of the studies considered here are longitudinal, which suggests this issue is progressively being addressed.
- Many of the studies build on the approach of (tourism) events research such as Getz (1997) *Event management and event tourism*; Ritchie (1984) 'Assessing the impact of hallmark events'; Hall (1992), *Hallmark tourist events: impacts, management and planning*. However, these studies are not specifically designed for cultural events, and their methods have mostly been applied to sporting events, which have not been considered here.
- The traditional focus on short-term economic impact research is deemed inappropriate in most studies - particularly those of an academic

nature. Hall (1992) argues that environmental, socio cultural and political effects are probably more important but have tended to be ignored because (1) Festival organisers and councils commission research to get economic data, (2) sociocultural impacts are less easily quantifiable, and (3) research concerned with sociocultural effects may find results that are 'less politically palatable [...] particularly if what might be regarded as negative consequences, such as increases in crime or conflict between locals and visitors, are seen to outweigh the perceived economic gains'. (p.315)

- Apart from some studies of small events, no publications were found that assessed the environmental impacts of cultural events as distinct from other physical impacts, such as infrastructure (Dimanche 1996). Mason and Beaumont-Kerridge (2004) suggest that these are often be perceived as negative unintended or unplanned environmental effects, such as litter, traffic congestion, etc and are 'likely to be downplayed by festival organizers, promoters and pro-event local politicians', which leads to them being under-studied. However, academic studies have not focused on this issue either.

Despite the frequent reference to gaps in the available literature, the heightened visibility and ever increasing interest in hosting cultural events, be it on a large, medium or small scale, is having an effect on the range and quality of research approaches. Since 2000, studies are diversifying and longitudinal research, as well as multi-dimensional methodologies - beyond the economic sphere - are becoming more common and expanding beyond the academic environment. This situation calls for a follow-up literature review on this still young but quickly expanding subject matter for impact research so that we can ascertain the improvement of available literature in this area.

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