



Event tourism and event imposition: A critical case study from Kangaroo Island, South Australia



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HIGHLIGHTS

- A case study of the 2011 Kangaroo Island Pro-Surf and Music Festival is presented.
- Event tourism is used by government and industry for neoliberal agendas.
- Events imposition occurs to secure growth, branding and political goals.
- Current event practice gives too little consideration to community interests.
- Event failure can occur if the community opposes the imposition of such an event.

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ABSTRACT

Events are increasingly a focus for destination marketing organisations because of the tourists numbers and spending they attract. As a result, an event tourism phenomenon has emerged which seeks to exploit events as tourism assets for growing tourism. Such practices may have significant consequences for local communities. This article offers a case study analysis of the 2011 Kangaroo Island Pro-Surf and Music Festival to illustrate how such dynamics can play out. This event was developed by event tourism authorities without pre-consultation with the impacted community, which led to community opposition. This opposition undermined the event's success and future. This work offers a detailed case study that provides some insight into the policy dynamics of the event instigators operating under a neoliberal policy paradigm. This article contributes to efforts to build knowledge resulting from critical deconstructions of political and economic dynamics that shape tourism policy and planning (Dredge & Jamal, 2015).

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1. Introduction

'Kangaroo Island is one of South Australia's strongest tourism assets. It has the potential to grow even further without sacrificing its consumer appeal as "Australia's Galapagos" ... In the short to medium term, Kangaroo Island will remain a priority for marketing activities, domestically and internationally' (South Australian Tourism Commission (SATC) and Tourism Kangaroo Island (TKI), 2012, p. 3).

Event management is an emerging field of study, with

knowledge expanding through empirical and conceptual analyses. Certain trends in research are discernible. Reflecting the concerns of government and commercial interests, extensive focus on the economic benefits of hosting events are clearly evident (Mair & Whitford, 2013). Additionally, extensive study is given to the event-goers' motivations, needs and experiences and to the supply and management of events by professional event managers supported by enabling government policy environments (Getz, 2008). These predominant tendencies mean that the complex dynamics of events and the policy and politics of events are still incompletely understood as certain gaps remain (Mair & Whitford, 2013). Little work has been undertaken which provides an in-depth view of the political dynamics and controversies that may accompany event tourism which is pressed on communities as tourism growth and branding is sought by destination marketing organisations and

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tourism industry stakeholders. Additionally, the journal of *Tourism Management* has seen a recent call for more critical deconstructions of the political and economic structures that shape tourism policy and planning (Dredge & Jamal, 2015). This case study offers rare insight into event planning dynamics that demonstrates how event tourism organisers may impose events on communities in the pursuit of tourism growth.

This article narrates the story of the controversy that erupted over plans to hold a world-class surfing event and music festival at Vivonne Bay, Kangaroo Island (KI) in 2011. This small community of some 40 people living in a beautiful spot on the southern coastline of KI became host to more than 3800 people after a heated battle was fought over the proposed event. Key players included: 1) the peak surfing body Surfing South Australia (SSA), coaxed into organising the event by 2) Events SA of the South Australian Tourism Commission (SATC), who called themselves major sponsors of the event along with 3) Sealink, a key business force on the island operating a monopoly ferry service and integrated travel service. The community learned about the event through the local newspaper which announced “surfing pro tour comes to Vivonne Bay” and anticipated some 5000 attendees (Black, 2011a, p. 1). The event fostered community tensions as some members of the local community opposed the event for several reasons, including the lack of consultation, the choice of location and time of year and the question of who stood to benefit from the event. Others in the local community expressed concerns about the planning and management of the event; while others expressed support for the event for its economic and social opportunities. While the event was held without any major problems, it was deemed a failure for a number of reasons including the fact it lost money and also it was not run for the three year cycle that was planned.

The conflict surrounding the event will be analysed through case study methodology to develop some understandings about contemporary events and the pressures that are exerted to harness events for their tourism benefits that may be to the detriment of the communities where they occur. Hall and Rusher (2004) argued ‘there ... remains relatively little analysis of the political context of events and the means by which events come to be developed and hosted within communities’ (cited in Mair & Whitford, 2013, p. 10). This article provides unique insights that demonstrate that under neoliberal agendas, events may be forced on communities resulting in serious consequences. While other work has examined such theory applied to mega-events (e.g. Rojek, 2014), this analysis demonstrates that this is also applicable to more minor events. The results of this research suggest that event tourism should be examined through political lens to ask questions of who benefits, how power is asserted and what rights do communities have when their landscapes are designated as event tourism destinations. This analysis offers a concept of ‘event imposition’ to describe the ways in which events may be pressed on communities in the interests of powerful tourism/event tourism stakeholders.

2. Literature review

This study is situated at the interface of events, tourism, regional development and community participation in planning. Events, event management and event impacts have been a relatively recent focus of study in the academy (Getz, 2008; Rojek, 2014). But it is the recent emergence of event tourism which is the crucial development of concern here. This literature review focuses on the failure to identify the community as a key pillar of event tourism and the impacts of neoliberalism on the policy and planning of event tourism, both of which are important contexts for understanding the case study that follows.

Events and festivals have been occurring for millennia, as people

gather for religious, cultural and social purposes. In recent times, when events have become the subject of focused academic study, maturation of knowledge is evident as reviews of progress occur (e.g. Getz & Page, 2016; Mair & Whitford, 2013). Simultaneously, events have been industrialised and professionalised; with event studies, event management and event tourism emerging to drive significant change in events and their purposes (Getz, 2008). As Getz has stated, event tourism is ‘the systematic planning, development and marketing of planned events as tourist attractions, and for their benefits to place marketing, image-making, and development’ (2010). In this way of looking at events, we are offered two possible perspectives: a supply side and a demand perspective. According to Getz:

On the supply side, destinations develop, facilitate and promote events of all kinds to meet multiple goals: to attract tourists (especially in the off-peak seasons), serve as a catalyst (for urban renewal, and for increasing the infrastructure and tourism capacity of the destination), to foster a positive destination image and contribute to general place marketing (including contributions to fostering a better place in which to live, work and invest), and to animate specific attractions or areas (2008, pp. 405–6).

For the latter, Getz suggests:

A consumer perspective requires determining who travels for events and why, and also who attends events while traveling. We also want to know what ‘event tourists’ do and spend. Included in this demand-side approach is assessment of the value of events in promoting a positive destination image, place marketing in general, and co-branding with destinations (2008, p. 405).

Seen through an event tourism lens, places where events occur are destinations to be marketed and branded to attract tourists to visit. What is absent from this perspective is the local community where the event occurs; when previously the enjoyment and participation of the local community was the key driver of events, with the transition to event tourism they are almost erased from consideration. In fact, local community are represented only indirectly in Getz’s framework for understanding event tourism (see Fig. 1).

In examining this framework, one is hard pressed to discern the local community and their interests, whereas it is much easier to identify the event goer and the event planners and managers. Community perhaps may be found amongst the stakeholders cited on the left, amongst the participants mentioned in the centre and would clearly be part of the ‘outcomes and the impacted’ seen on the right-hand side of this model. However, none of these give them any secure position of power and authority, and may in fact relegate them to being seen as problems to be managed. But this case study suggests that with a community rights perspective on events, community could be seen as a key third pillar.

Getz (2008) expands on this framework by mapping what key questions might be addressed by each facet of the model and possible research methods to employ. Fig. 2 provides Getz’s (2008) framework for ‘outcomes and impacted’.

The questions posed in this list are potentially more attentive to community interactions with events but essentially start from the premise that events are to be held and that event organisers should consider ways to engage the local community to avoid difficulties. This brief survey suggests that the local community where events are held are seldom studied as a distinct entity and rather are usurped in the categories of participants and/or stakeholders.

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