



Reconnecting with place through events: Collaborating with precinct managers in the placemaking agenda

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Reconnecting with place through events – collaborating with precinct managers in the placemaking agenda.

Abstract:

Purpose: Whilst academic research can capture an existing sense of place, the act of *placemaking* through strategies such as events depends upon the attitudes and actions of precinct managers and event organisations. This paper investigates the collaborative research process between researchers and a precinct manager that highlighted an event's ability to contribute to placemaking within that precinct.

Approach: Using the results of this event experience study, informal interviews with the SPA research partners, secondary data and a longitudinal, reflective account of the research collaboration, the research process itself was investigated to see how it assisted in the (re)design of the event within the precinct manager's placemaking strategy to encourage a family-friendly, beach-centred culture within the precinct.

Findings: It is proposed that the research results combined with a collaborative research process itself facilitated a shift from the business imperative on the event's economic performance indicators to a broader discussion of the event's role in shaping local's (and visitor's) perceptions of place, and allowed a broader discussion of the role of events in driving a "liveability" and/or placemaking agenda, complementing the economic impact agenda, for the precinct manager.

Practical and social implications: The paper suggests how and why it is important for academics to work collaboratively with precinct managers to translate the concept of placemaking into the actual design of events within a place. To do so requires the researchers to bridge the gap between theory and practice. For the concept to be translated into action, greater attention was drawn to the placemaking role of events, positioning it along economic impact measures as a valuable outcome of events.

Originality: Few co-authored studies, representing both researchers and practitioners exist within the events sector, and this study contributes towards understanding process of research impact, by considering the forces capable of delivering a placemaking agenda through a precinct's event portfolio.

Key words: events, placemaking, community, partnerships, participant generated images, mixed methods, research impact.

Introduction

Events are increasingly recognised as a tool for urban renewal and place branding (e.g., McClinchey, 2008). Local councils, precinct managers and business invest significant funds into developing an event portfolio that will attract visitors to the region as well as encourage local residents to attend

the event. Often the intention of such events is couched in terms of economic outcomes – e.g. increased precinct visitation rates attributable to the event and associated increases in visitor spending for local business (Brown, Getz, Pettersson & Wallstam, 2015). Even in cases where this is not the explicit goal, evaluation of the event's success often reverts to these numerical performance indicators, with less focus given by precinct managers on the community's sense of place and its relationship to the event.

And yet, there is an increasing body of research that highlights the role of events in placemaking – largely adopting a community-focused approach (REFS), without always paying sufficient attention to the stakeholders and powerbrokers who can facilitate, or derail, the placemaking ability of events within a precinct. This paper reports on research into an event experience at a community event, Sand Safari 2015, held on the Gold Coast, Australia, and how the researchers engaged in collaborative process with the precinct managers to foreground the event's capacity to reconnect community to the precinct's desired sense of place. The event is sponsored by the Surfers Paradise Alliance and attracts local residents and tourists to the Surfers Paradise beach precinct. Through a collaborative research process reported in this paper, an increased focus on the event's role in (re)creating the precinct's place meaning for locals, i.e. its placemaking role, was identified as a major theme in the event's outcome evaluation. By focussing on the bridging the academic/practitioner divide, the empirical research results were carried forward into the design of the 2016 event to deliver a placemaking agenda.

The focus of this paper is on the collaborative process with our event partner, Surfers Paradise Alliance (SPA) (a membership-based destination management organisation for the precinct) and understanding the impact of academic research into the event experience and its placemaking role, as a result of this collaboration. The event in question, the Sand Safari, forms part of SPA's rebranding strategy with the tag line "Rediscover an Icon" designed to encourage locals and visitors alike to reconnect with the beach culture of the precinct that appeals to a wider, family-oriented community. This rebranding strategy, and the associated events portfolio, forms part of a larger process of urban renewal for this precinct, which has sometimes been associated with the latter stages (consolidation and even stagnation) of the tourism destination lifecycle, and has previously elicited perceptions of being "very touristy", "very commercialised", and "very artificial" (e.g., Lawton, 2005) or even described as the "Achilles heel" for the region, generating negative perceptual repercussions (Faulkner, 2003).

The Sand Safari has been running for three years, and each year is themed to appeal to a family audience, as part of a strategy to attract families back into the precinct. In 2015, the theme was Disney, and the sand sculptures reflected characters such as Winnie the Pooh, Aladdin, Shrek, Mickey and Minnie Mouse, all crafted on Surfers Paradise foreshore against the backdrop of the beach and ocean. However, the role of the event in strategically delivering a desired *sense of place* was not explicitly on the precinct manager's agenda in the first three years of the event's production. The authors were invited to investigate the customer experience at the event, using a two-stage, mixed-method research design, including a photo elicitation technique using participant-generated images (PGI) and associated survey (Stage 1), followed in-depth interviews (Stage 2) to further explore themes emerging from Stage 1. The brief of the research project was left relatively open, and SPA offered strong support with participant recruitment, offering incentives, promotion of the research and data collection links on their website.

Using the results of this event experience study, informal interviews with the SPA research partners, secondary data and a longitudinal, reflective account of the research collaboration, the research process itself was investigated to see how it assisted in the (re)design of the event within the

precinct manager's placemaking strategy to encourage a family-friendly, beach-centred culture within the precinct. It is proposed that the collaborative research process itself facilitated a shift from the business imperative on the event's economic performance indicators to a broader discussion of the event's role in shaping local's (and visitor's) perceptions of place, and allowed a broader discussion of the role of events in driving a "liveability" and/or placemaking agenda, complementing the economic impact agenda, for the precinct manager.

Given the central role of the precinct manager as the agent with the ability to translate concepts such as sense of place into an agenda of placemaking through events, this study pays equal attention to the empirical results of the research on the sense of place outcomes of the events, as on the process of integrating a deliberate and strategic placemaking agenda into the precinct manager's future considerations for the event. The paper therefore combines a review of the literature on events and placemaking as well as understanding the collaborative process between academics and practitioners, before presenting results from the event experience study itself, and concluding with a discussion of the research process that allowed the academics to position the placemaking agenda alongside the implicit economic impact agenda associated with events and precinct renewal. In doing so, the aspects of the process of collaboration and engagement with the precinct manager that facilitated the foregrounding of an authentic placemaking agenda within a primarily business-oriented framework, were established and the specific impacts of our research on the placemaking role of the event, as carried forward by the precinct manager into the event's 2016 (re)design, were identified.

Literature Review

Events and placemaking within the business sector

Events and festivals have long been understood as opportunities to express shared, collective meaning and values (Getz, 1991). These may be in relation to various forms of identity, including the places which we inhabit (Jaeger & Mykletun, 2013). A number of studies have captured the relationship between events and places; e.g. Derrett (2003) study of events in regional Australia as a vehicle to represent "communally agreed values, interests and aspirations" (p.57). Research by De Bres and Davis (2001) found that a community festival in USA did lead to a positive self-identification for the local community, whilst Harcup (2000) reported how a festival in the UK can create moments of change in the community's relationship to a place.

Much of this research on festivals and place concern the ability of the festival to generate a strong local community spirit, celebrating a community's unique identity and sense of pride (Rogers & Anastasiadou, 2011). It focuses on the community outcomes of staging events, such as the enhancement of local identity and character (Jago, Chalip, Graham, Mules & Ali, 2003). Moscardo (2007), for instances, incorporates an enhanced sense of place, connections to regional places, and an awareness of local context (infrastructure, destination awareness, presentation of local regional products and services) as important elements that enable festivals to foster regional development.

It is interesting to note that whilst festivals and events are often linked to the sense of place concept, several authors have argued that relatively little is known about the relationship between festival or event places (McClinchey, 2008 citing Getz, 2007). Indeed Van Aalst and van Melik (2011) argue that most research in this area focus on what a festival can do for a place, with little emphasis on what a place can do for a festival. They argue for more research on the reciprocal relationship between places and the festivals that they host. Similarly, Lau & Li (2015) argue that even less

research has been undertaken on the relationship between festivals and sense of place within urban settings.

This apparent contradiction between the stated importance of so called “place-bound” festivals (Van Aalst & van Melik, 2011) and their relationship to place, and the apparent paucity of research on the places themselves, is that much of this research focuses on the social representations of place through the notion of community (REFS); the concept of community is most commonly understood as a geographical, place-bound concept, therefore expressions of community belonging and pride would also arguably be linked to place. The social constructions of culture, identity and meaning therefore become tied up with a representation of place, thereby connecting people, festivals and places.

Festivals and events, and in particular art and cultural events, can therefore play a significant role in so-called placemaking of a location, a process designed to create benefits for its local community, both economically and in terms of liveability, wellbeing and aesthetics, drawing on community aspirations and values to develop a shared sense of place (Aravot, 2002; Ouf, 2001). In their definition of creative placemaking, Markusen and Nicodemus (2014) highlight the core features of strategic action by cross-sector partners, a place-based orientation, and a core of arts and cultural activities. They highlight that the placemaking process seeks both economic impacts, as well as physical impacts on the space, and social impacts on the local community, facilitated through art’s ability to inspire. Importantly, the placemaking process must have multi-stakeholder “buy in” (including local community, event and precinct managers and the private sector) and strengthen the connection between people and public spaces, paying particular attention to particularities of the physical, cultural and social identities of that place.

The relationship between placemaking and events is facilitated by a number of broader concepts common to both areas. Place meaning is commonly socially constructed and replete with its own symbols and labels that are created and reproduced through interpersonal interactions, for example through events and festivals. Place meaning is also associated with place attachment, or place belongingness where people feel as though they are connected to and hold membership with an environment, as well as place identity whereby those dimensions of self that define the individual’s personality are related to the physical environment through beliefs, feelings, values and goals. Again, events constitute one way of marking this collective relationship between place and people.

More recently, however, as events become part of the business world, they are understood as forming part of place’s portfolio to enhance place branding and place competitiveness. The placemaking process, previously a balance of economic and social benefits now runs the risk of becoming overly focused on the former, as events become increasingly used in place branding or city marketing exercises driven by destination marketers and urban planners to raise the international profile of a city and attract visitors (and the revenue associated with visitors) (Quinn, 2005). Some have argued that this focus on driving competitiveness towards investment in an increasingly globalised world can lead to problems of serial reproductions of places, or even placelessness (originally defined by Relph, 1976, in his book preface as “the casual eradication of distinctive places and the making of standardized landscapes that results from an insensitivity to the significance of place”) as initiatives that work in one context are copied in other contexts (Richards & Wilson, 2007).

Establishing event and festivals which link lived identity of local communities to the specificities of place is essential to avoiding the pitfalls of placenessless, and return instead to a placemaking agenda which lead to more positive social benefits derived from events (Richards & Wilson, 2007; Van Ingen & Van Eijck, 2009). This approach, however, requires an explicit agenda on behalf of event

organisers to value community outcomes from events, understand the meaning attached to a place by local community, and an effort to integrate that place meaning into the event design. Placemaking through events must push through the barriers of short-term, economic impact imperatives that form part of every precinct manager's remit, and seek to do more than increase place competitiveness and attract business investment into a place.

Meanwhile, the sense of place that is the desired outcome of the placemaking process is usually considered from the community perspective, as the "end-users" or beneficiaries of placemaking (REFS). Although invariably acknowledged as a collaborative, multi-stakeholder process, less attention is paid to those actors who have the power to facilitate, or derail, the desired sense of place. Moreover, the economic imperatives around return-on-investment for events may become so important that it may become difficult for precinct managers, who must report on measurable economic impacts to their stakeholders (local council and local businesses), to explicitly value community links to place over the more tangible economic outcomes. Meanwhile, the latter aspect of placemaking, i.e. the social benefits of event, are valued primarily by local community, who have little direct decision-making power in the design of events. In fact, more often than not, the calls for greater place meaning to be integrated into event design, are most frequently raised by academics (e.g., McClinchey, 2008; Mair & Duffy, 2015; Xie & Sinwald, 2016), who, as external agents, have little power to shape the placemaking agenda of event portfolios.

Thus, rather than focussing on empirical evidence to demonstrate the importance of placemaking through events, or the sense of place derived from events, this paper explicitly consider the role of academics in engaging with stakeholders to ensure a placemaking agenda that balances local community benefits of events with economic impacts. In this paper, the process that allowed researchers with an explicit interest in event experience, place meaning, and wellbeing outcomes of events to partner with a precinct management agency representing local businesses and reporting to local council, and study the experience of event-goers at a local public art event, is explored. The role of academics is considered as external to the practitioner system of event design, management and reporting, and a "research impact" framework, is used to analyse how partnership enabled the reconceptualization of the event design towards a greater sense of place.

To help understand the collaborative process between researchers and practitioners, and the co-construction of research that influences practice, the literature on research impacts and researcher-practitioner collaboration is reviewed next. The broader management literature has been used, as it has been noted that tourism, events and the services sectors in general are largely under-represented in the literature on researcher-practitioner collaborations (Chen, Wu & Wu, 2013).

Co-creating the placemaking agenda – practitioner and researchers collaborations

As highlighted above, it is proposed that in the case of placemaking and events, an agent external to the business and/or management sector may encourage the consideration of community benefits alongside economic outcomes from any given community event. It is, however, the combined process of (i) delivering empirical results and (ii) translating them into managerially useful information that will prompt an event management agenda that includes placemaking. To the extent that events are understood as part of the business management body of knowledge, it may be assumed that the difficulties encountered by other disciplines in terms of producing managerially useful (and/or used) research will also apply to the events sector. Therefore, understanding why

much research is not applied in the business context, and how to facilitate its application, is of great relevance to the topic of placemaking and event management, and is the focus of this next section.

When looking at the relationship between academics and practitioners, it is argued that the gap between theory and practice, that is, how academic knowledge influences practice, is becoming increasingly problematic (Starkey & Madan, 2001). Many academics believe that they have a limited impact on practitioners, failing to generate a sense of managerially useful implications from their research. For most, this gap is positioned as a relevance/rigour gap, whereby the theoretical and methodological rigour required to publish in top academic journals and meet academic indicators of performance, prohibit the type of research that is relevant to industry.

The result is a lack of research impact on practitioners, sometimes attributed to either a “lost in translation” gap (when managerially useful research fails to reach practitioners) or a “lost before translation gap” (when managerially useful research is not undertaken by academics). A number of solutions have been put forward to overcome the gap, many of which focus on communication and the accessibility of research as the main issue to be resolved, arguing that researchers can and should provide expert knowledge that allows the practitioner to reframe managerial problems and find previously not considered solutions (Chen, Wu & Wu, 2013).

Others, however, perceive the issue as far more fundamental. Drawing on Luhmann (1992), the somewhat controversial paper by Kieser and Leiner (2012) suggest that the academic and practitioner domains should be understood as two distinct, closed systems and that direct communication between the two systems is impossible, as each system is governed by its own unique, binary communication code. For practitioners this code may be represented as “increasing/decreasing organisational success” whilst for academics, this code may be “true/untrue”. Kieser and Leiner (2012) suggest that collaborative projects be understood as a separate, new system – a contact system that is linked to its two parent systems and exists only temporarily.

This “separate systems” perspective is of interest in this case, as it has been argued that reinstating a community benefits/placemaking outcome from events may in fact require an external agent. This agent would be separated from the business code of “increasing/decreasing organisational success”, and be able to present alternative positions to the practitioner. These positions may not even be considered within Chen et al.’s (2013) forms of research impact as reframing of problems to find solutions, as it is suggested that the practitioner may not view placemaking and events as a problem requiring a solution. It may therefore be useful to explore this systems approach to the researcher/practitioner gap in a little more detail.

Beech, MacIntosh and McLean (2010) also perceive the researcher/practitioner gap as two separate systems. Unlike Keiser and Leiner’s (2012) more radical position, Beech et al. (2010) believe that, whilst co-creating knowledge in shared time/space does not occur, there is a sequence of coming together for exchange of ideas or input followed by separate enactment (for practitioners) or analysis (by researchers). Thus, research may have a useful impact upon practitioners once ideas have been exchanged, and there has been time for reflection and integration of the knowledge created by researchers.

Rasche and Behnam (2009, p.243) follow a similar principle, suggesting that the integration of knowledge is “only possible by first acting as if the offered knowledge were relevant and to then modify and extend it according to the idiosyncracies of the system” (Rasche & Behnam, 2009, p.243). They further argue that the knowledge produced by one party must be altered and adjusted

according to the “local” circumstances, i.e. as a form of “nonidentical reproduction”. This may often take the form of a key idea or label, which can then be processed according to the logic of the system and thus modified, extended, supplemented or even neglected (Rasche & Behnam, 2009, p. 250). They argue therefore that academics should aim to deliver research that is interesting, i.e. that catches the practitioner’s interest, rather than is relevant, as such.

Returning to the issue of placemaking as part of the event management process, the key idea in this case would be the importance of a community’s sense of place outcome from the event, to be positioned alongside the importance of the event’s economic outcomes, in the mind of the precinct manager. Based on the review of the literature in this area, it is proposed therefore that the systems separating academics from practitioners may in fact work in the favour of reintroducing a community benefit outcome from placemaking in events (this latter forming the key idea or label within the research), as long as the relevance gaps (“lost before translation” and “lost after translation”) can be successfully overcome through effective communication and generative dialogue (Beech et al., 2010).

In this case, the process of the collaborative study between three researchers in event management and the managers of a precinct’s event portfolio, with a fiscal responsibility to council and local businesses, as reflected in their key performance indicators, is reported. We emphasise that this research was not undertaken as a consultancy project, designed to deliver specific empirical findings to a client, but was initiated from the industry partner/precinct manager’s curiosity towards a specific research method, PGI, and the insights that it might offer regarding the event-goers experiences within the precinct. The collaborative nature of the research is further reflected in the authorship of this paper.

The findings are therefore presented in three sections. The first two sections cover the empirical study results, based on the PGI and follow up interviews. Meanwhile, the third section details the process, informed by the literature review on practitioner-academic divide, on how the results were translated into managerially useful information that facilitated the integration of a placemaking agenda into the 2016 Sand Safari event design.

As will be reported in study findings section, the qualitative research findings on the event experience revealed the event’s ability to recapture a sense of place recognised and valued by the local community, but which was perceived to have waned over the last decade. This issue of sense of place became the key idea or label that caught the interest and imagination of the practitioner partner, and drove the placemaking agenda associated with this particular event. The following sections outline the specific context of this research, as well as the process of collaboration, before briefly discussing the event experience study’s findings. Next, the research impacts with specific reference to events and placemaking is described, before concluding with some reflections and recommendations on working with an event portfolio manager on developing a sense of place as part of a broader placemaking agenda.

Research Context and Process

This collaborative study originated as a result of establishing a close working relationship with the CEO of the Surfers Paradise Alliance, an industry oriented body that promotes the tourist precinct of Surfers Paradise on the Gold Coast in Australia. The CEO had attended a research seminar at the researchers’ university and was impressed with the potential of collecting rich data through the participant generated images (PGI) method. The CEO and research team reflected on possible goals

of the event experience study and suitable upcoming events. It was agreed that the Surfers Paradise Sand Safari Event would be appropriate as it was forthcoming within a six-month period, allowing time to develop the program of research and meet with the SPA stakeholders. The Sand Safari Event is conducted annually and is a free-entry, sand sculpting competition held over two weeks in February on the foreshore promenade of Surfers Paradise. Each year, the sculptures represent a different theme – Disney Magic in 2015 – to attract locals, day visitors and tourists to the beach precinct.

This event forms part of an event portfolio designed to rebrand and rejuvenate the precinct. At the time of writing the precinct had adopted the tagline “Rediscover an Icon”, in an effort to recapture the precincts heyday of the 1970s. Now a mature tourism destination, local perceptions of Surfers Paradise have arguably been in decline, described as “very touristy”, “very commercialised”, and “very artificial” (e.g., Lawton, 2005) and believed to generate negative perceptual repercussions for the entire region (Faulkner, 1998; 2005). As part of the rejuvenation plan, SPA aims to attract more families into the precinct, replacing the typical “School leavers” and “Glitter strip” images that generate negative perceptions (Scott & Smith, 2005).

The key objective for the collaborative study was to better understand the customer experience at Surfers Paradise Sand Safari Event. Events are becoming increasingly important, as part of a destination’s portfolio to attract tourists and local residents. Understanding the customer experience at an event is both a useful management tool and can increase satisfaction with, and loyalty towards that event and the destination. Whilst surveys are one approach used to understand event attendees’ experience, other methods such as PGI can provide a data richness and depth of meaning not captured in surveys.

The Findings section first details the research outcomes of the study, focussing on the respondents’ reaction to the event’s ability to influence the precinct’s sense of place. Next, the Findings detail the collaboration process and impact of the research on the industry partner, with particular reference to the literature on crossing the practitioner-academic divide and translating research into managerially useful information. That section highlights how the industry partner reviewed the results of the study and used these to enhance the following year’s event with strong links to sense of place. Figure 1 illustrates the process of collaboration for the study.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Event Experience Study Methods and Findings – Events and Placemaking

For the purpose of understanding how this collaborative study influenced the placemaking agenda of the precinct manager, the study methods and findings are briefly reported. Further details of the study itself are reported elsewhere (authors withheld).

The research adopted a mixed methods approach by employing participant generated images and associated narrative analysis at Stage one and interviews in Stage two. Participants were asked to take photographs associated with their experience at the event, and select five for further analysis. Participants (N=52) were sent an online survey (via Qualtrics) that incorporated their five photos and asked a series of questions on their feelings associated with each photo and the situational

attributes that contributed to these feelings. Participants were also asked to write a short narrative about the experience represented in each photo. Overall satisfaction and loyalty questions, as well as socio-demographics and visitation questions, were also included in the survey.

After the preliminary findings were identified a sub-sample of the same participants (N=27) were interviewed at Stage two about the key themes identified in Stage 1. The industry partner undertook the lead role in terms of running the collection of the photos and offering prizes to participants. All details of the event experience study were negotiated and discussed with the university research team. The interview stage was used to gain richer in depth insights to the event experiences of the participants with particular emphasis on destination perceptions and attachment, as this emerged as an important theme based on the analysis of the photos and narratives.

A total of 23 interviews were deemed usable (one interview failed to record, whilst three respondents provided limited answers to the questions – often limited to yes or no answers), transcribed and content analysed. Finally, social media posts from the event were collected and analyzed for photo content, likes, shares and comments. Figure 2 presents an overview of the research method and data collection process.

Insert Figure 2 about here

Analysis and event attendees' photos and associated evaluations

A total of 260 photographs and images were collected and coded into five key categories, representing two major themes were derived from the images themselves, the importance of sand and the connection with the beach precinct. Sand was described as a sensory medium that apparently conveyed a range of other experiences and emotions, connection, nostalgia, playfulness and wow factor of the sculptures themselves for the event-goers. Another important theme noted in the content analysis was the event-goers relationship with the place of Surfers Paradise, captured through the appreciation of an aesthetically-pleasing natural backdrop for the sand sculptures (around 75% of the sculpture images include the beach and ocean as their backdrop), as well respondents who ventured onto the beach to play with the sand, recreating their own version of sand sculpting, and further extended to others enjoying their beach experience.

The importance of the setting is captured by Rachel (a day visitor, 18-24 years old, repeat event visitor) who provided the following narrative about the experience represented in her photo (Fig. 3):

Insert Figure 3 about here

I took this photo because I just loved the natural backdrop to this sculpture. Not only did I love the sculpture but the backdrop really gave it more of a WOW effect. The light behind the sculpture really made the littlest details stand out and see every curve and groove. I loved this experience so much and I would do it again in a heartbeat. I just love the beach atmosphere and having Disney characters at my favourite place just made it all the better. I felt so happy in this photo, so calm and inspired.

In addition, respondents were asked to nominate the elements of their experience that were important and reflected in each of their photos. The natural backdrop, i.e. beachfront and foreshore, was selected 107 times of a total of 260 images. This result reinforces the importance of the place-based attributes of the event, in conjunction with the sculptures themselves. Finally, each PGI-study

respondent was asked to report “anything in particular that really enhanced or made our experience at the event”. Again the setting of the event was reported a number of times, for example in these responses:

*“the interactive sculpture. The **beautiful surrounding scenery & day**”*

*“the **backdrop of the beach was beautiful and relevant**”*

*“**Overall setting – love the beach. Time with Family – Quality. Food and drinks close by**”*

*“Spending time with my kids. **The backdrop of Surfers beach, the awesome sunshine**”.*

*“that it is **held on the beachfront**”*

*“the excitement – as a I have mentioned in the other questions **we don’t normally go down to Surfers Paradise so this was a very experience... Great Experience!**”*

Follow up interviews

These initial findings indicate those elements of pride, belonging and a celebration of the community’s social and historical conditions were clearly present in the images and accompanying narratives. These findings set the agenda for the placemaking theme of the event experience study, and were further explored in follow up interviews carried out with a sub-set of the respondents from Stage 1. The interview coding further highlights how the event improved their perceptions of Surfers Paradise for 19 of the 23 respondents. This theme in particular highlighted strong links to the placemaking role of events, as evidenced in the following excerpt:

for many years it’s lost its family touch and that’s what I really loved about this, is they brought back a feeling that I used to have when I was little and going to the beach with my family, when I was really little. And I haven’t been to Surfer’s for a long time as a family, every Friday night we used to go to the beach and go to Charlie’s and have an iced chocolate and then we stopped doing it because Surfer’s didn’t have that family vibe anymore. Like there were always lots of young people everywhere and now, when they did this sand sculpture, it brought me back when I was young because it brought back family, to the Coast. And that’s what really made the thing for me, when I say they nailed it, is they brought back that nice feeling of what Surfer’s Paradise used to feel like, and that’s how it should feel like. (Alice, a local, 25-34 years old, repeat event visitor).

Respondents were quick to note the connection between the sand sculpting and the beach culture of Surfers Paradise. Of the 23 respondents, 22 noted the links between the sand sculpting and the beach, one even making specific reference to the Surfers Paradise’s brand

Being Surfers Paradise which is known for its beaches, I just think it’s an ideal location. I know there were other sand sculptures set up [...] but I didn’t actually go to see any of those because it was more to do with the beach and the location at Surfers Paradise that appealed to me, yes.

Nancy, (a day visitor, 35-44 years old, and first-time visitor to the event).

Other respondents, meanwhile, noted the “beachy” feel of the event, and how well it tied into their perceptions of place. For example, Emily (a day visitor, 35-44 years old, and first-time visitor to the event) had this to say:

in what I picture as a beach culture, which is like chilled out, relaxed, take your time, and have some fun, definitely. Like the concepts line up that way.

Whilst Vicky (a local, 35-44 years old, and first-time visitor to the event) noted that

It was linked because of the fun and the laughter and everything about it in what people experienced there. The whole lot, yeah that was. And because it's the sand sculpture on the beach it has that link. But it has that fun, outgoing sort of vibe if you know what I mean. You know the whole lot just blends in absolutely wonderful.

Industry Collaboration Outcomes: Economic Impacts, Placemaking and Renewal

As described in the research context section of this paper, the original brief for the research was left relatively open, allowing a collaborative research approach to be implemented between the academics and industry partner. Our research partners, the precinct manager, stated interest was to explore the lived event experience through the photo elicitation methodology. The research findings (presented above in brief, described in *withheld for review* in further detail) drew attention to the connection between the precinct’s beach culture and the sand art, allowing event-goers to reconnect with the precinct’s place meaning. However, in order for these research findings to be influence the *placemaking* ability of the event, the results had to be translated into managerially useful information – a task that the literature suggests is particularly challenging for business researchers (Starkey & Madan, 2001).

In light of the literature on the researcher/practitioner gap, in particular Beech et al.’s (2010) importance of post-study reflection and exchange of ideas, we detail in this next section, how the Sand Safari’s placemaking potential was brought to the fore as an important consideration in the event’s outcomes and thus, strategic design. In this next section, we outline the major areas that crossed the gap, and became part of what Kieser and Liner (2012) describe as the new “contact system” between researchers and practitioners.

In terms of impact, four main areas were picked up by the research partners and formed part of the post-study reporting and debriefing (Fig. 4). These included specific changes to the design of the event itself, economic impact reports, a change to the theming of the event to focus on the beach culture of the precinct and finally, an adoption of our research methods to evaluate future events.

Insert Figure 4 about here

From an impact perspective, it is noteworthy that the local media coverage of the research was presented as an economic impact study. In itself, the title of the media reported highlighted the importance accorded to economic impact of events – “Sand Safari creates \$9.2m tourism windfall”, reporting the number of visitors attracted to the region to attend the event, and “spikes in visitor”

spend. As our data did not include any economic impact measures, this was somewhat surprising, but is an indication of the foregrounding of economic outcomes from a community event. This is in line with our argument that there is a big challenge in drawing attention to the longer-term intangible event outcomes such as focusing on the community benefits, a key element of placemaking. This is arguably consistent with Chen et al.'s (2013) notion of research impact as the reframing of problems to find solutions, rather than providing solutions to known problems.

However, the media report also quoted SPA's Chief Executive, Mike Winlaw, as saying "it is also great to see the perceptions coming through from the study were that Surfers Paradise Precinct is seen as family-friendly and inclusive". Thus, the placemaking role of the event was successfully integrated into the "managerially relevant" findings from the event experience study, perhaps as a result of the collaborative attempt to bridge the researcher/practitioner gap. Based on the literature on research impact and overcoming this stated gap, how placemaking was integrated into the event agenda by addressing the "lost before translation", "lost in translation" and "closed systems" issues discussed in the literature review, is explored (Bartunek, 2007; Kieser & Leiner, 2012)

Returning to Figure 1, it is noted that SPA's CEO approached the researchers with an interest in the PGI methodology and its ability to generate rich, qualitative data on the event experience. The brief was therefore left relatively open, with an expectation that the research would deliver insights into the Sand Safari experience. As such, the "lost before translation" did not feature heavily in our pre-research briefings, which instead focussed largely on the logistics of the data collection and the contributions of each partner in this area. The open nature of the research brief could be a reflection of the pre-existing relationship between the researchers and the practitioner partner, as well as the partner's genuine interest in qualitative data on event experiences.

More attention was therefore given to bridging the "lost in translation gap"; as shown in Fig. 1, three debriefing sessions were held with various members of the event and precinct management team. During the first post-event research, a powerpoint presentation was given by the researchers covering the general respondent and the overall assessments of the event (satisfaction, loyalty, etc.), highlighting the enhancers and detractors from the event experience and the themes identified in the photos, the narratives and images, as well as the analysis of the social media analysis.

The researchers provided illustrative examples of images, narrative text and audio files to give a greater voice to event-goers. Specific respondent profiles (as opposed to aggregate data) were also presented to showcase the diversity of respondents and their experiences. The last two slides covered four "overall findings" points, including one point specific to the event's placemaking ability, and four recommendations emerging from the data, ranging from operational points (signage, parking and fencing) to event design elements (engaging with sculptors and interactive components), and lastly, a final thought around theming of the event and a question around the relationship between people, place and art.

This mode of presentation was largely designed to address the academic/practitioner gap following a knowledge transfer model. The researchers deliberately trialled alternative media to communicate the results, e.g. audio snapshots of the interviews that captured changed perceptions towards the precinct as well as "infographic" style presentation of respondent profiles. At the end of the presentation, feedback and questions by the partner signalled a particular interest in one of the audio clips that highlighted a strong place attachment perspective, as well as discussion around the event experience detractors highlighted in the presentation.

In an effort to further draw out the placemaking capacity of the event, a follow-up meeting (initiated by the researchers) discussed how the research findings might be implemented in the design of the 2016 event. Unlike the previous meeting, this meeting was less formal to invite more dialogue, crossing the “closed systems” divide, by discussing the relevance of the findings directly on the event design. This approach was reminiscent of Rasche and Behnam (2009) “as if it were relevant” approach to managerially relevant research – suggesting that research is not relevant of its own accord, but can provide a basis for further sensemaking processes, causing an “irritation” within the practitioner system of knowledge that can be translated, “modified, extended, supplemented or event neglected” into managerially useful knowledge (Rasche & Behnam, 2009, p.250).

In this meeting, the researchers’ approach also drew on Markides (2011, p.125) analogy of research as “equivalent to producing different components of a car” when practitioners, in fact, do not want individual components, but instead, want the assembled product. The researchers therefore provided concrete, visual illustrations of the principles highlighted in research findings and translate them into possible practice application, thereby provoke a discussion of the principles in the event design (Fig. 5). In this sense, the researchers were aiming for a more “holistic answer” to the issue of placemaking (our agenda) and event design (Markides, 2011, p.127), whilst inviting practitioners to act as “practical idea provider, brainstorming partner, [...], devil’s advocate, playing on their strengths in providing different insights into managerial practice” (Chen et al., 2013, p.580). This researcher-driven initiative further acknowledged the placemaking capacity of the event depending upon the practitioners recognising the value of the community’s transformed sense of place as a result of attending the Sand Safari event.

In this meeting, three overarching principles that emerged from the event experience study were presented; (i) the importance of performance at the event; (ii) the importance of activities at the event; and (iii) the links to place – emphasising the links between the beach culture and sand sculpting, encouraging people to reminisce on their childhood enjoyment of the beach. Figure 5 illustrates how the visual material provided by the researchers were considered by the practitioner partners were “modified, extended, supplemented or even neglected” (Rasche & Behnam, 2009, p.250), moving from a traditional, heritage image of place, to a more modern, fantastic image of place, in keeping with Surfers Paradise’s identity of fun, vibrant and eclectic.

In an effort to “close the loop”, the researchers requested a final meeting once the 2016 event was complete, and explore how (if at all!) the research findings and principles had been implement into the 2016 event design. Table 1 and Figure 5 both illustrate how the key points from the research findings were translated into the 2016 event design. Of note was the CEO’s comment that the biggest change between 2015 and 2016 was the event’s role in creating a sense of place for the precinct, focussing on the beach culture of the precinct and how it can be conveyed through the art, and moving away from the championship aspect of the event. Based on the key idea of placemaking in the findings, the event’s tagline was modified from “Magical Friendships” to “Art inspired by Sand and Sea”.

This theme was to be further followed up in the 2017 event with a sea mythology theme for the sand sculptures, complete with live mermaids to encourage the performativity and engaging nature of the event. Thus, the event’s role as a placemaking tool was firmly adopted by the precinct manager, and positioned alongside the economic impacts of the event, as “people are now following the event” and attendance had increased by 50% since the previous year, arguably indicating greater community interest in, and support for, the event.

Finally, a second major outcome of the research was the adoption of the PGI method as an evaluative tool for other events in SPA's portfolio. For instance, the marketing manager stated that as a result of working on this project they appreciate the value of the using photos as way to capture the event experience: "one of our innovations taken from the research that we learned from [*name withheld for review*] was the take-a-selfie campaigns" (Phil Bradstreet, SPA Marketing Manager). SPA's new take-a-selfie campaign serve several purposes with regards to the placemaking agenda

Insert Table 1 about here

In summary, the findings of the research clearly indicate the ability of the event to influence the sense of place for event-goers. This confirms much of the previous research on events and sense of place, both for the community, and as a destination branding strategy (McClinchey, 2008). However, understanding how the event impacts a sense of place is not sufficient to influence the *placemaking* ability of the event, which requires the industry partner to understand, value, and integrate the research findings into their practice. This is where the second stage of the research sought to better understand the research/practitioner gap, and develop ways of crossing the gap to provide managerially useful findings that would influence the placemaking capacity of the Sand Safari event in the design subsequent event experiences.

As presented in Table 1, many of the findings were adopted and integrated into the event design. Perhaps most importantly, as noted by the CEO "based on the research, we reshaped our thinking so that the art festival will actually be inspired by sand and sea" (SPA CEO, pers. comm.) as well as designed to attract the family market into the precinct. A second important outcome was the adoption of the method itself (the PGI and photo narratives) as a means to better understand the event experience across a range of events, and generate images that capture the event-goers sense of place within the precinct.

In conclusion, it is proposed that the collaborative process was successful in drawing attention to the placemaking role of the event in terms of community benefits, and positioning this alongside economic measures as an important outcome of community events. While it is understandable that the latter is a key performance indicator for industry, it is believed that there is a role for external agents to stimulate a longer-term focus on event outcomes that focus on placemaking. Researchers are one type of external agent, but in order to do so, they must find effective ways to cross the researcher/practitioner divide.

When asked to comment on the collaborative process and the impact of the research, the precinct managers replied that the research provided an opportunity to have internal discussions about the event, its design, its purpose and its outcomes – an opportunity to "focus the mind and develop themes and ideas that are cost effective and match the goals of an interactive event" (SPA CEO, pers. comm.). The "recommendations" slide provided the basis for these internal discussions, whilst the three principles discussed in the follow-up, informal meeting allowed the managers to become more experimental with the event design, trialling new ideas (Fig. 5), some of which would carry through to future events, whilst some would need "further tweaking" and others would be discarded for future events.

In the final meeting with SPA, the discussion focussed on a dual agenda of creating a strong event investment portfolio for stakeholders as well as enhancing liveability for the region, with a placemaking agenda around "always having something on, looking for events that related to families that are entertaining, eclectic and fun" (SPA CEO, pers. comm.). This agenda most likely explained

the CEO's original interest in better understanding the event experience as part of the precinct manager's rebranding and rejuvenation strategy, but at the start of the research partnership this agenda was more implicit than explicit. By the end of the research process, placemaking was firmly on the precinct manager's agenda, with a stated intention to adopt the qualitative methodology for future events, and findings to be included in stakeholder reports as part of the social sustainability impact of Surfers Paradise's community events (SPA CEO, pers. comm).

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