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Document Reference:

Impacts 08 – Langen & Garcia (May 2009) *Measuring Impacts of Cultural Events*



Measuring the Impacts of Large Scale Cultural Events: A Literature Review

May 2009

Report by

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Impacts 08 is a joint programme of the University of Liverpool and Liverpool John Moores University
Commissioned by Liverpool City Council



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1. Summary

This paper offers an overview of studies measuring the various impacts of large scale cultural events. Fifty studies from both academic and consultancy backgrounds are assessed, with a focus on the methodologies used and the types of impact assessed. The study concludes with a discussion of key trends and research gaps.¹

2. Introduction: measuring the impacts of large scale cultural events

As the range of cultural festivals and major cultural events has grown over the years, their impacts have increasingly come under the scrutiny of funders, policy-makers and planners. Various evaluations and more in-depth studies have found that large scale events have a variety of potential impacts, including economic, social, cultural, political, physical and environmental ones. What is more, these impacts are not always necessarily positive, but can be negative as well, or have a positive effect on one dimension (e.g. economic) while having a negative effect on another (e.g. environmental or cultural).

Much of the literature studying event and festival impacts builds on the early work in the area of event tourism, in which Getz (1997), Ritchie (1984) and Hall (1992) are the most often cited authors. However, these studies are not specifically designed to measure the impacts of *cultural* events, and their methods have mostly been applied to sporting events. This review therefore specifically assesses the available literature dedicated to measuring the impacts of large scale cultural events and festivals. It is not so much concerned with the outcomes of these studies as with a discussion of the types of impact studied and the methods used. For this reason, conceptual studies or commentaries have not been taken into account, unless they included a discussion or example about how to measure impacts. The 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 over the last 15 years (1993-2008), but relevant studies from the EU and the rest of the English speaking world have been included as well.

A total of 50 publications were identified, which were consequently grouped according to size of event type.² Of these, 16 studies looked at *major cultural festivals*, defined as multi-annual events with an international reputation, built over a period of time. A total of 14 studies were dedicated to cultural *mega events*, typically large scale, short-term events with a one-off nature, which attract the largest range of participants and media coverage. A further 20 studies were dedicated to the impact of the European Capital of Culture event, which arguably takes up a position in between the first two.

3. Major cultural festivals and events

Studies of the impacts of major cultural festivals mostly take the form of event evaluations carried out for organisers or funding bodies, which seem to function primarily as evidence of the positive economic value of

¹ **Acknowledgement:** An earlier version of this paper was published in *Arts Research Digest* 45, Spring 2009. **Keywords:** impact measurement; mega events; major events; cultural festivals; European Capital of Culture. **Suggested reference:** Langen, Floris and Garcia, Beatriz (2009) *Measuring the Impacts of Large Scale Cultural Events: A Literature Review*, Impacts 08 Background report [online: <http://www.liv.ac.uk/impacts08/Dissemination/I08reports.htm>]

² The initial search included a wider focus on *all* festivals and events, ranging from small community festivals to recognised 'mega' events. Excluding sporting events (except for those specific cases where the focus of the study was on the *cultural* component of the programme), studies of single small-scale events such as concerts or performances, and the impacts of (parts of) the cultural sector as a whole, a total of 117 publications were identified. By far the largest number of this focused on small scale, local and regional festivals and events (50 studies), while 17 studies were found to have no clear focus on one type of event. Of the latter, half were studies dedicated to the impact of specific sectors or regions; the rest were concerned primarily with discussing methodological issues, but did not connect this to any specific typology of event.

the events. The most common approach in these studies is the analysis of visitor expenditure data in order to determine the direct, indirect and induced contribution of the event to the local or regional economy. Data is typically collected from a variety of sources, including visitor surveys, box office data, and stakeholder interviews.

Baker and Associates (2007), in an assessment of the economic impacts of the Glastonbury Festival, expand on this 'general' approach by pointing out the 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 stakeholders interviews. Snowball and Willis (2006) take a significantly different approach. In their (academic) study of the South African National Arts Festival, they use Choice Experiments (CE) to value the utility visitors derive from various sections of the festival. They argue 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.

A detailed comparison of four existing economic impact studies of major festivals in the UK and Spain by Vrettos (2006) found that all studies used different methodologies and justifications, especially in relation to the multipliers used. While all studies reported positive impacts, none questioned whether these impacts occurred because of the artistic or rather the social nature of the festival. Only one study noted that the net effect of the festival could be negative as well; however, no attempts were made to calculate the monetary value of any of the possible negative impacts (e.g. litter, noise, criminality).

A case study of the impact of various types of sports, culture and business events on Korean undergraduates' attitudes toward Germany, by Woo Jun and Lee (2008), seems to show an interesting contrast between the impact of sports and cultural events. Both sports and general art events were found to positively influence attitudes towards the brand Germany, but no effect was found for business events and cultural festivals. However, the value of this study is limited as the events chosen to represent the two latter types turned out to be relatively unknown to respondents. As a result, the study offers no hard evidence of specific impacts associated with specific types of events, and concludes that only internationally renowned events impact country brands.

Some of economic impact studies identified the need for additional research on social impacts. For instance, a report on Manchester's Pillar Events by Jura Consultants (2006) notes 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'. The authors 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. However, it has to be noted that some studies that *claim* to go beyond the assessment of local economic impacts in fact offer little more than some general observations based on a limited methodology. For instance, the evaluation of the Ghent Festivities by the Centre for Tourism Policy Studies (2003) claims to assess the economic, physical, functional, social and cultural effects of the event, but in reality is mainly concerned with quantifiable economic benefits.

Examples of impact assessments that *do* pay significant attention to non-economic impacts 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 Hamilton et al. (2007), who carried out an evaluation of the Highland Year of Culture, focusing on economic, social and cultural impacts before, during and after the festival year, using a range of qualitative and quantitative methods, including interviews, surveys, focus and discussion groups and press impact analysis. One of the focal points of this latter study was the impact of the variety of 'Highland 2007' events on Gaelic speakers and on school children in the Highlands and Islands region of Scotland, as well as the legacy of the year's programme.

Mason and Beaumont-Kerridge (2004) have examined visitor and residents' attitudes towards the economic, socio-cultural, environmental and political (community) impacts of the Sidmouth International Festival, using visitor surveys and focus groups with local residents during and after the festival. This study contains an extensive discussion of earlier publications 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'. Similar criticism can be 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 the cultural, community and social benefits of major festivals have not been systematically studied, while they point at the limitations of focusing on more narrow economic outcomes, such as comparability, reliability, and utility of estimates. As an alternative, they propose an 'inclusive research agenda', focused on 'the benefits of the festivals for the arts, culture, community, economy, society, and stakeholders'.

Only two studies were found that did not include any reference to economic impacts. Snowball and Webb (2008) examine the value of the National Arts Festival of South African 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 the city of 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.

4. Cultural mega events

By far the majority of studies on the impacts of mega events are related to the economic impacts of mega sporting events. While sporting events have been left out of the scope of this study for reasons of scale, some of these have included specific cultural strands in their programme, which in themselves are relevant here. In the context of the more general impact studies on the wider events, these programmes have received very little attention. For instance, the evaluation of the Manchester 2002 Commonwealth Games (FaberMaunsel et al. 2004) contains only a brief reference to Cultureshock, the cultural programme developed in conjunction with the Games. Similarly, the cultural component of the Olympic Games is noticeably absent from most Olympic impact studies. However, a small number of studies was found to focus on the cultural components specifically.

In the context of the Manchester 2002 Commonwealth Games, two studies evaluate the impact of the Cultureshock programme. Andrews (2003) assesses the programme's performance and evaluates its short-term impact on cultural organisations, audiences, city and region, addressing in particular the programme's impact on social changes at the personal and organisational level. The findings are based on a series of qualitative interviews with key stakeholders, questionnaires completed by attendees and non-attendees, and a review of monitoring forms. In a second evaluation of the programme (García 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. This 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.

In an earlier study, García (2001) assesses the marketing impact of the Sydney 2000 Olympic Arts Festivals. This paper, which reports on a four-year study of media clippings, concludes that the activities were marginal

to the mainstream promotion of the Olympic Games and that the event was thus perceived as a separate programme, which limited its impact amongst Olympic audiences. Other studies by García on the Olympic cultural programmes focus on policy and management issues but do not discuss methodologies for impact assessment other than noting the need for further evaluation (see García 2008). Popma (2004), the only other publication on the impacts of the Cultural Olympiad, assesses the potential impact of the 2010 Cultural Olympiad and the Olympic Arts Festival on the host community of Vancouver, as well as 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.

While the number of studies on the impact of cultural events taking place in the context of mega sporting events is small, the portion of studies looking at cultural mega events on their own is not significantly greater. One event that has attracted a (relatively) fair amount of attention has been the World's Fair or Expo, with five studies taking a number of different 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 studies on the subject. Although primarily concerned with economic impacts, Dimanche also attempts to measure impacts in other 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 studies examined 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 economic impacts in the shorter 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 uses records of US visitors 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' perception studies, stating that the question 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 due to their scale can have a profound impact on the lives of the resident population. Lim and Lee (2006) compare the same event with the Gyeongju Biennale, assessing the community's perceptions (both positive and negative) 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.

A study on Expo '98, 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 the host city of 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 Europe Awards ceremony held in Edinburgh in 2003. The local economic benefits of the event were calculated by SQW (2004), with a focus on measuring new or additional expenditure generated as a result of stimulated increase in demand. 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 event as a

vehicle to re-brand Edinburgh as a 'young' tourist destination was an important element in the political rationale to host the event. He points out that while the economic benefits of the event were apparent, the indirect benefits of being able to 'showcase' Edinburgh and Scotland were the most appealing to public officials. However, this study does not include any measurement of the events' impact on image or tourism. In a second study, Reid (2007) addresses community involvement in the event. He concludes that although 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, however, is that the thoughts of local young people are not examined, as Reid acknowledges.

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 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. The events taken into account here included 11 world Expos, 10 specialised exhibitions and 30 European Capitals of Culture.

5. European Capitals of Culture

The European Capital of Culture (ECoC) takes up a space in between the two types of events discussed above. While it appears very similar to large scale international cultural festivals in terms of programmatic elements, in sheer terms of scale the ECoC certainly can be described as a 'mega' event. Furthermore, although events can take place over the course of one full year it can be regarded as a one-off event, as each city holds the title only once.

The ECoC is generally regarded to play a key role in enhancing image, attracting tourists, and generally stimulating urban regeneration (see e.g. Balsas 2004), 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), reviews the impact of 29 cities that held the title of ECoC's between 1995-2004, and aims to examine their long-term legacies through online questionnaires completed by organisers from each city, interviews with correspondents from each city, and an analysis of publicised materials. The study argues that the ECoC title is seen as 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.

Richards and Wilson (2004), noting that very little attention had been paid to the image-effects of cultural events, have evaluated the impact of the ECoC status on the image of the city of Rotterdam, employing a survey of resident and non-resident visitors to measure the short-term effects, combined with in-depth interviews with policy-makers and cultural managers to assess longer-term effects. An extended version of this study, by Richards, Hitters and Fernandes (2002), also includes findings on Porto, the second ECoC in 2001. Another example of a study that examines the effect of the ECoC designation on a city image is García (2005). This study of Glasgow's year as ECoC in 1990 specifically evaluates the success of the event as a model for culture-led regeneration and argues that the changes to local image and identity are its most important long-term legacy. 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, face-to-face interviews, a small scale survey, and focus groups with representatives of cultural/political/business groups. The methodology employed to assess impacts on image and interrogating media narratives in the context of Glasgow 1990 is discussed in more detail in Reason and García (2007). A comparable study has been carried out by García (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.

Hughes, Allen and Wasik (2003) use 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 study was not so much concerned with 'the actual impact in terms of measurable or quantifiable outcomes', but the authors argue that even measuring distorted perceptions is relevant, as they influence attitudes and behaviour. In a similar fashion, Boyko (2008) has studied the impact of the ECoC programme on place meanings for the local community in the city of Bruges, using a mail survey and interviews. This study was concerned mainly with the social, physical and psychological effects of the event on the resident population. It found that many locals saw the impact of the event in negative terms, as they felt that local residents, ideas and culture were disregarded in favour of a focus on tourists. The study thus concludes that events such as the ECoC may reinforce negative meanings by not serving residents.

As was the case with other large scale events, some studies focus directly on the economic impacts of ECoCs. Richards (2000), although not concerned with the 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. ERM (2003) is the only publication found to make an assessment of *potential* economic impacts (i.e. prior to the event). This study also attempts to assess possible social and cultural impacts.

Of all the cities to hold the title, Liverpool's reign as ECoC in 2008 has attracted by far the most attention in terms of research output. Most of this has been carried out 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. The programme takes a longitudinal approach to measuring 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. Impacts 08 (2007a) describes the development of a longitudinal model for cultural impact assessment and provides the baseline against which the social, economic, cultural and environmental impacts of Liverpool's ECoC programme are to be measured. A wide range of aspects is taken into account, including economic impacts and processes; the city's cultural system; cultural access and participation; identity, image and place; physical infrastructure and sustainability; and the philosophy and management of the process. Annual updates are prepared on all benchmark indicators (e.g. Impacts 08 2007b, 2008a), as well as updates of 'core' messages summarising key economic, cultural, social and environmental impacts in the lead-up and during 2008 (Impacts 08 2007c).

Economic outputs of the project build on work by Sapsford and Southern (2007), which sets the baseline on which to measure changes in the sub-regional economy, and include a number of follow-up studies on smaller sections of the local and regional economy, using a range of methodologies (postal surveys, in-depth interviews; semi- and unstructured one-to-one interviews). Other published Impacts 08 research to date considers social and cultural impacts on local narratives of the city (Melville, Selby and Cliff 2007), impacts on media representation (García 2006) and impacts on stakeholder engagement and relationships (O'Brien and García 2008). In parallel to the Impacts 08 research, an evaluation by West et al. (2007) has identified the year's potential positive and negative impacts on the mental well-being of those directly and indirectly affected by the programme, through a series of workshops with a wide range of stakeholders and key informants, community profiling and existing research evidence.

6. Discussion

Hall (1992) has argued that environmental, socio cultural and political effects are probably more important than economic ones, but have tended to be ignored because festival organisers and councils commission research to get economic data, socio-cultural impacts are less easily quantifiable, and research concerned with socio-cultural 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’.³ To a certain extent, this observation seems to hold true for studies of large scale cultural events as well, with economic impact studies clearly dominating the literature. Of the 50 studies included in the review, just under half focused almost exclusively on economic impacts, while another 16 studies offered assessments of economic and social impacts combined. Of the 16 studies on major events, nine were commissioned evaluations; all of these focused on economic or mixed socio-economic impacts. The vast majority of studies assessing non-economic impacts were published in an academic (i.e. non-commissioned) context, while only two commissioned studies were found that did *not* look at economic impacts – with the exception of studies carried out under the Impacts 08 project, which takes up a middle position between consultancy and academic research.

Most strikingly, the environmental impacts of large scale events (as distinct from other physical impacts, such as infrastructure) remain a virtually untouched subject matter. Mason and Beaumont Kerridge (2004) suggest that negative unintended or unplanned environmental effects, such as litter and traffic congestion, are ‘likely to be downplayed by festival organizers, promoters and pro-event local politicians’, which leads to them being under-studied in this context. In general, negative impacts were discussed by only a small number of studies, all of which were published in an academic context. This seems to indicate that most studies, whether carried out by commissioned consultants or independent academics, set out to show the positive value of events and festivals.

A number of studies have noted the lack of clear methods to measure intangible socio-cultural impacts. As the overview shows, qualitative methods such as surveys and focus groups, stakeholder interviews, participatory mapping techniques and documentary reviews are most commonly used for this. However, some studies have attempted to bridge this gap by combining qualitative methods with more quantitative ones (e.g. García 2005, 2006 and 2007). This issue has come to the fore on a much wider scale within the area of small scale community festivals and events, where a growing number of studies can be found dedicated to developing tools to measure the economic, social and environmental impacts of festivals (see e.g. Fredline, Jago and Deery, 2003). In many of these studies, small scale events serve as case studies to test the validity of the methods developed, which might indicate that some of these methods can potentially be applied to large scale events as well.

Finally, the main research gap noted in report recommendations is the lack of attention for long-term impacts. A number of studies, particularly those of an academic nature, have noted the inappropriateness of the traditional focus on short-term economic impact research. While the majority of studies, especially those carried out as commissioned work, still involve primarily ex-post assessments of impacts, some of the studies considered here *do* stretch over a number of years, typically starting some time before the event and ending some time after its ending, which suggests that this issue is progressively being addressed.

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

³ Hall (1992), 315.

young but quickly expanding subject matter for impact research so that we can ascertain the improvement and diversity of available literature in this area.

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