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Event experiences: measurement and meaning

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides an introduction to Special Issue on ‘Event Experiences: Measurement and Meaning’. It reviews the research conducted by the ATLAS Event Group over the past decade, and highlights the interplay between qualitative and quantitative research on events during this period. Major research themes related to the event experience are analysed, including the social dimension of events, event design, visitor engagement, eventful cities and event networks and platforms. The different quantitative and qualitative contributions to the issue are introduced and compared.

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Introduction

Experiences are central to events, but measuring and contextualising the meaning of event experiences remains a major challenge for the field of event management. While Berridge (2012, p. 274) argued that event management ‘is largely about delivery of experiences’, contrastingly Getz and Page (2016, p. 8) state that ‘the essence of a planned event is that of an experience that has been designed’ and Kuiper and Smit (2014, p. 29) believe ‘Experience is an intrinsic process that happens within the person who receives the experience.’ Following several appeals to advance research with innovative methods to understand the visitor experience (Dixon et al., 2011; Holloway et al., 2010; Jaimangal-Jones, 2014; Mair & Whitford, 2013) quantitative research has continued to evolve and more qualitative research has begun to emerge in the field of event management.

Event experience research reflects the complexity of the phenomena being studied, with a wide range of different approaches, often with little common ground between them (Richards, 2019). The study of experiences has often been implied, rather than direct, relying on the quantification of elements such as satisfaction and intention to measure event experience and relatively few qualitative studies to better understand the meaning of experience. The topic of event experience has therefore become increasing a subject of debate in the events research meetings organised by the Association of Tourism and Leisure Research and Education (ATLAS). In this introductory paper we outline the

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emerging discussion on measurement and the contextualising of meaning of event experiences using examples from papers presented to and/or published by the ATLAS Events Group. We then present the papers in this special issue as a continuation of this developing discussion, illustrating innovative advancement in the event experience research agenda.

Up to 2019, the ATLAS Events Group had organised ten meetings on a range of topics, many of which have related directly or indirectly to event experiences. In all of these meetings the researchers involved also discussed issues of the measurement and meaning of experiences. Over the years, there has been a slow evolution of thinking among members of the group on what event experiences mean, and on how to measure and analyse those experiences [Table 1](#).

In the inaugural meeting of the group in Breda, the focus was on the social dimension of events, which included a number of papers dealing with the social experience of events. For example de Geus (2013) attempted redress the relative lack of attention for social experiences in her quantitative study of the effects of group size at the Dutch Queen's Day event. She noted a division in the conceptualisation of experiences between the managerial approach based on measures of satisfaction and quality, and social science approaches focussed on memorable or peak experiences. In her study she used enjoyment, memories and negative emotions as the outcomes and Pine and Gilmore's (1999) four experience dimensions (entertainment, escapism, education and aesthetics) as measures of the experience. She found a positive relationship between group size and outcome variables and positive emotion, perceived quality and satisfaction. Different types of experiences were also related to different outcomes – for example higher levels of educational experiences generated more memories, but also more negative emotions. Carlos Fernandes examined the links between community events, social capital and experiences, arguing that memorable event experiences would also deliver competitive advantage for tourism destinations. Hixson (2013) used a mixed methods approach to analyse young people's experiences of the Adelaide Fringe Festival, particularly from the spectator point of view. Focus groups, questionnaire surveys and interviews revealed that higher levels of engagement stimulated more desire for participation. She also found that young spectators relied upon the opinions and experiences of friends and family to make decisions on which elements of the event to attend. The many contributions to the meeting and the resulting

Table 1. ATLAS Event Group meetings and publications, 2011–2019.

Year and location	Meeting theme	Publications
2011 Breda	The social dimension of events	Richards et al. (2013)
2013 Peniche	Imagineering events	Richards et al. (2015)
2014 Sheffield	The Attendee Experience: The Quest for Engagement	Biaett (2015), Moss (2014)
2014 Malta	Monitoring and evaluating cultural events	Peperkamp et al. (2015), Davies et al. (2015)
2014 Budapest	Events and the Quality of Life	Richards (2014)
2015 Lecce	Creating and bidding for events	Richards and Marques (2016)
2016 Barcelona	Rethinking the eventful city	Richards and Colombo (2017)
2017 Viana do Castelo	Event Experiences: Special, Engaging, Different?	Larsen and Bærenholdt (2019)
2018 Copenhagen	Events as platforms, networks and communities	Richards and Jarman (2020)
2019 Girona	Transformation through Innovation and Creativity in Events	Simons (2020)

publication (Richards et al., 2013) emphasised the social dimension to experiences, which often form the motivations, content and outputs of the events themselves.

The meeting on 'Imagineering events' in 2013 moved the focus towards the design and production of event experiences. Greg Richards introduced the concept of designing or imagineering events as interaction ritual chains (IRC), using the work of Randall Collins (2014) to analyse the design principles of events as moments of physical co-presence through observations and interviews. This is a line of work that was subsequently developed by Ilja Simons (2020) and Davide Sterchele (2020) through case studies of cultural and sports events, largely based on qualitative research. Qualitative research on experiences was also evident in the analysis of the event visitor journey by Gerritsen and van Olderen (2015), and Arthur Maria Steijn (2015) used a case study approach to examine the design and effects of live music performances. In contrast Cardoso et al. (2015) used visitor surveys to assess the experience of the Santarém Gastronomy Festival in Portugal, finding a high correlation between experience outcomes and behavioural intentions.

The growing need to integrate visitor and producer perspectives on experiences were the subject of the following meeting on 'The Attendee Experience: The Quest for Engagement' in Sheffield in 2014. A number of papers reflected the growing need to measure and explain the experience phenomenon, including contributions developing an event engagement scale and the initial presentation of the Event Experience Scale (EES) (de Geus et al., 2016). However, the most important element of this meeting was the examination of the event experience from a variety of different perspectives. These included Vern Biaett's (2015, 2018, 2019) work on his neoteric PX (participant experience) Theory, which examined the social construction of experiences with ethnographic participant observation grounded theory research methods. Jonathon Moss also presented his research on the live music festival experience as a convergence of tourism, culture, identity and emotion and established a conceptual framework of emotional experiences at these events. A continuation of his work on event experiences is contained in the paper by Moss, Whalley and Elsmore in this volume. Eliza Hixson (2014) explored attendee experience and the extent to which this is prioritised in the business events sector. Her research included interviews with practitioners in the business events industry, as well as surveys of young event attendees. A more innovative approach to the study of experiences was explored in a workshop session organised by Colin Beard and Will Russ, who developed a roleplay looking at the experience of people attending a charity event and sleeping out with homeless people. The confrontation of traditional and more innovative research methods in Sheffield stimulated a lot of discussion about the nature of experience and its measurement and meaning. It was agreed that event research to date had been dominated by quantitative, survey based research. Some participants felt that there was still a need for more basic data on visitor experiences so that relationships between motives, experience and behaviour could be traced. Qualitative approaches, however, were recognised for their ability to reveal the contextual meaning of experiences such as senses of individual well-being and *communitas*. While qualitative research was relatively new for the events field, it was noted that it had previously been applied in other fields. It was recognised that these differences had stimulated a greater interest in varied research approaches.

In Budapest in 2014, attention was paid to the effects of events on the quality of life (Richards, 2014), also seen as an important outcome of the 'eventful city' concept

(Richards & Palmer, 2010), which was discussed from a range of different perspectives in Barcelona in 2016. This shifted the perspective to the macro-management of experiences through the production of event portfolios, as discussed by Ziakis (2013) and Antchak (2018). In these strategies, the production of social interaction was arguably important (Marques et al., 2020), although as Smith (2015) pointed out, efforts at generating entertaining experiences ended up as denigration of the experience of public space through events. The globalisation or 'serial reproduction' of experiences through event networks operating in different cities around the world was also considered by Richards and Colombo (2017).

The meetings in Lecce and Malta dealt with themes relating to the staging of major events and efforts to measure their effects before, during and after the event. We are now seeing more sophisticated measurement and monitoring schemes being set up for large events, which also require major investments. Richards and Marques (2016) emphasised the problems of measuring not just the impacts, but also the longer term effects of such events, as impact monitoring programmes are often dismantled as soon as a bid fails, or immediately after a programme is completed. This is an experience repeated at many different events, including the UK City of Culture Programme, as Miguel Anxo Rodríguez González and Daniel Barrera Fernández showed in their presentation. Jane Tattershall believed that it was important to consider the relationship between whole 'Events-capes' and atmospherics, and there should be more research on the co-creation of experiences by groups of stakeholders, rather than just event designers and organisers.

In 2017 the event experience was once again central to the discussions, and papers presented in Viana do Castelo came from a variety of perspectives. These included Biaett's (2018) re-development and expansion of his neoteric PX Theory into 'Organic Festivity Theory', which was based on three primary constructs: immersion in more physical and collaboratively creative activities, sensually infused crowd enthusiasm, and cyclically aroused crowd emotions, the combination of which can create transformative liminal, social capital increasing, optimal experiences. This approach has echoes of the IRC approach introduced in the 2011 meeting. Richards' presentation on the Event Experience Scale (EES) compared data from sites in different countries, indicating that quantitative work can identify generic aspects of event experiences in different geographical settings and in different types of events. These findings were reflected in papers presented on gastronomic and carnival events in Portugal (by Carlos Fernandes and Xerado Pereiro, respectively) and for yoga events in the UK and Portugal (Lénia Marques, Carla Melo and Juliette Hecquet). Jordi Oliva Codina and Alba Colombo developed a scale based on the Intense Music Experience (IME) proposed by Schäfer. This scale identified the intensity of the emotions felt while listening to music, combined with the Cultural Impact Perception (Colombo, 2016) tool. Experiences were also analysed at the city level by Vladimir Antchak (2018) who looked at how a host city is experienced during the course of large scale events. He particularly focussed on how buzz or atmosphere is created, with Lefebvre's rhythm analysis suggested as a potential conceptual tool.

In the Copenhagen meeting in 2018 discussions of 'Events as Platforms, Networks and Communities' presented another change of context, this time to the linkage and framing of experiences. Papers presented in the meeting included the introduction of the Event Social Interaction Scale (ESIS) by Marques et al. (2020), providing an extension of the EES specifically designed to measure the effect of social interaction on event experiences.

There were also contributions on events as a platform for expression and exchange, the need to link events together to generate distinctive experiences, and the role of event communities in experience production. Langridge-Thomas et al. (2020) analysed the co-creation of experience through platforms at the Royal Welsh Show, while the group-based production of dangerous experiences was studied by Colombo et al. (2020) in the *Correfoc* (literally ‘fire running’) groups in Catalunya. Jarman (2020) analysed the networks between fringe festivals in different countries as an essential element of experience production.

In Girona in 2019 the meeting theme was ‘Transformation through Innovation and Creativity in Events’, and there was particular attention for the ways in which experiences can stimulate transformations in people and in event design. Willem Coetzee analysed the effect of affective engagement on visitor experiences and behavioural outcomes at a number of different events studied for the ATLAS Events Experiences Project. Using the EES, the study found that a participatory sports event scored low on excitement and memory, but high on intimacy. Vladimir Antchak and Charlotte Whitehouse conducted a study on designing event experiences for people with Down Syndrome, which underlined the challenges of evaluating the experiences of people with special needs. They investigated how people with Down Syndrome experience events through organisations working in the field, including a support group and a theatre company. Data were collected through a focus group, including people with Down Syndrome and their parents. The results underlined many differences in the way that this group experiences events, including their low tolerance for noise, which is not widely known. These research results could be fed into event design, for example by introducing quieter periods in the programming. Valentina Gorchakova’s development of an experiential framework for events also raised a number of issues related to measurement and meaning. These included the relative impact of personal factors versus event design components on experience, and the difficulty in disentangling these two factors. She also discussed the challenges of measuring co-created experiences, the need to include subjective perceptions and the social context (who are we with?) and adjustments to recollection – often we are measuring how people think they felt afterwards rather than how they actually felt at the time of the event.

The evolving discussions of event experiences within the ATLAS Events Group and the many collective and individual publications shows a growing interest with different aspects of event experience measurement and meaning. In the early editions of the ATLAS meetings, much of the experience research relied on quantitative methods, predominantly visitor surveys, to measure experiences. The perceived need to quantify and compare visitor experiences from different event settings led to the establishment of the ATLAS Event Experiences Project (Richards & Ruiz Lanuza, 2017), which over the past five years has completed thousands of surveys at cultural, sports and business events. This research contributed much to comparative research on events, and clearly showed that experiences are strongly influenced both by the personal characteristics of the visitors and the contextual elements of the event, including, but not limited to, place, design, and programming. The research also developed from the development of a single Event Experience Scale (EES) into a more diversified approach with different scales (Marques et al., 2020) and a focus on different types of events and different dimensions of experience (Coetzee & Pourfakhimi, this issue).

At the same time, developing discussions within the group revealed a dissatisfaction with the limitations imposed by a predominantly quantitative approach to experiences. Although surveys arguably have advantages in terms of comparability and in-situ data collection, they also have limited ability to capture the contextual richness of event experiences relative to other approaches, such as phenomenological analysis (Zhang, 2019). There have also been calls for a more holistic approach to event experiences. For example, Liu et al. (2017) have suggested that an event experience needs to be seen as part of an overall 'ecosystem' in which visitor experience is affected by a number of different touchpoints.

A number of shifts have therefore been evident in the work of members of the ATLAS Events Group in recent years, with contributions drawing more widely on qualitative approaches. More insights have also been developed from a service design perspective (Miettinen et al., 2014), using techniques such as storyboarding and prototyping. There has also been increased use of mixed methods and grounded theory. For example Gerritsen and van Olderen (2015) analysed the event journey using a mix of expert meetings, depth interviews, mystery visits and surveys, each giving a different perspective on the event experience as it unfolds. Vern Biaett's (2018, 2019) research on festival experiences, presented as a confessional tale (Van Maanen, 1988), has been developed from a socially constructed grounded theory perspective.

The work of the ATLAS Events Group also indicates a shift in scale in terms of the analysis of event experiences, moving from the experience of individual event visitors and individual events, towards social groups, whole cities and their portfolios of events, eventfulness and rhythm. There is also growing attention for different aspects of the value of events and their experiences (Richards, 2020), as Davies & Jaimangal-Jones show in their paper in this issue. Comparative research on event experiences and fixed attractions and tours also helps to identify the 'essence' of event experiences (Richards et al., 2020). There has also been discussion about the extent to which event experiences can actually be considered 'extraordinary', as Ilja Simons (2019) has discussed in her analysis of cosplay events. The evolving discussion on the nature of event experiences has also added additional layers of complexity in terms of measurement and meaning. The subjects of co-creation, gender, sexual orientation, generational differences, racism, economics, spectatorship, and other 'hot topics' create the opportunity for niche event experience research.

This special issue of the *Journal of Policy Research in Tourism, Leisure and Events* presents a collection of papers that explore the ways in which visitors experience events, through the collection of quantitative or qualitative data, or a combination of the two. These papers are drawn from a wide range of scholars, including many members of the ATLAS Event Group. This special issue provides an important framing for such work, because it foregrounds the visitor experience and makes the measurement and meaning of experiences explicit. In much previous research, experiences have usually been studied implicitly rather than explicitly. We have also been keen to encourage new and innovative approaches that will help illuminate different aspects of event experiences. In line with the evolution in the ATLAS research noted above, we have attempted to bring together both quantitative and qualitative approaches to the measurement and contextual analysis of experiences, which continue to help us to better understand the visitor experience.

Qualitative approaches

Although event management is a distinct field ‘much of its theory and knowledge comes from other fields and disciplines’ (Getz, 2000, p. 20). Since the early 1900s qualitative research methods have been employed to contextualise the meaning of event experiences. The subject has been explored by anthropology (Esman, 1982; Fortes, 1936; Huizinga, 1950), sociology (Falassi, 1978; Gamson, 1996; Jankowiak & Todd White, 1999; Turner, 1982), leisure (Nash, 1953; Veblen, 1899), psychology (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), philosophy (Van Gennep, 1909), geography (Jamieson, 2004; Tuan, 1977), history (Gilmore, 2010), the performing arts (Ehrenreich, 2006; King, 2010; Van Belle, 2009), theology (Cox, 1969; Pieper, 1965) and other disciplines and authors. It really wasn’t until the recognition of the experience economy (Pine & Gilmore, 1999) that the relatively new field of event management began to consider using qualitative methods to research event experiences. Early qualitative research articles from an event management perspective that used participant observation to study event experiences included Kyle and Chick (2007) and Pettersson and Getz (2009). By 2012 the *Routledge Handbook of Events* featured a chapter (Ryan, 2012) on using ethnography to understand the experience of events as well as a chapter (Shipway et al., 2012) that outlined qualitative tools for event researchers. From humble beginnings qualitative event management researchers have now arisen, are multiplying, and the field has begun to embrace qualitative methods. For this special edition the following qualitative research articles on event experiences are being added to the growing body of contextual knowledge surrounding the event experience.

Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork conducted at equestrian ‘endurance riding’ events, both in the UK and Australia, **Katherine Dashper and Anne Buchmann** apply a multi-species lens to the investigation of event experiences. With their analysis they found that during equestrian events, the experiences of human participants are profoundly shaped by those of the equine participants, and the interactions between the two more-than-human perspectives. They argue that ‘research on event experiences needs to move beyond the focus on individual responses and reflections on personal experiences, and to try and account for the social and collective aspects of those experiences’. They contend that a multispecies perspective opens up different questions about what makes a ‘good’ or memorable event experience, and what those experiences can mean to the human participants. Adopting a multispecies ethnography they attempt to decentre humans, in order to position human experiences as just one part of a ‘messy entanglement’ with a variety of human and nonhuman others, studying the ‘contact zones’ between nature and culture. This approach required a mix of qualitative methods, including in situ interviews, observations and analysis of relevant texts. This revealed a heightened sense of awareness and arousal at the event, due to the strangeness of the surroundings (for the horse) and the desire to perform well at the event (for the human). The horses were therefore co-creators of event experiences, actively shaping and helping create those encounters.

Caitlin Brooks examines the issue of consent in the context of the Burning Man event. Starting from the idea of leisure being equated with free choice, she outlines the constrained nature of leisure choices, which usually require some form of consent from others. This is particularly important in the context of events, where thousands of others may form a community that both enables and constrains our activities. Exploring Burning Man, a ‘transformational event’ staged in the Nevada Desert, which has its own

unique code of behaviour, with semi-structured in-depth interviews of 13 participants allowed the examination of the 'culture of consent' at this event. Analysis of the data found that 'creating a consent culture can empower participants, providing an atmosphere that helps them create meaning in their lives.' In other words, the rules of the ritual help to create a space for transformational experiences. To best understand that space required the kind of rich data that can only be surfaced by qualitative research.

Karen Davies & Dewi Jaimangal-Jones argue for constructionist, longitudinal and ethnographic approaches to gathering rich data for the measurement of event experiences. They believe 'whilst the EES put forward by de Geus et al. (2016) and Richards and Ruiz Lanuza (2017) does go some way to allowing comparability across a number of case studies, there are reasons to suggest that more in-depth investigations should accompany these data to take into more account both the context and the content of the events themselves.' They used a mix of qualitative methods to study experiences of the Llangollen International Musical Eisteddfod, an event that has existed for over half a century. The research ran over a three year period, in which an auto-ethnographic account of experiences was assembled through observation, interviews and photographic evidence. Following in-depth interviews, participants were asked to take photos of their experiences of intercultural exchange and communication at the event. As they note, there has been growing interest in the use of visual methods in events research. They also see a shift from the evaluation of events experiences through consumer satisfaction towards measuring their overall value, which is a co-creative process.

Elaine Rust employed a classic multidimensional qualitative case study method approach to collect data from a variety of stakeholders at three small scale grass root events in the UK. She triangulated her data collection at a folk music festival, a food festival, and a farmers market via semi structured interviews, questionnaire surveys, observation and documentary analysis. To develop a better understanding of how, and in what form, experiential value is co-created at small-scale cultural events this multi-stakeholder perspective was deemed most appropriate. From data analysis four important influencers emerged as determinants of the overall event experiences, including a sense of belonging, place, atmosphere, and reputation, all of which were strongly influenced by concepts of authenticity and immersion. In the deep context uniquely revealed with the use of this type of qualitative method, Rust came to understand that experiential values are very complex, delicately balanced, readily disturbed and not easily duplicated from event to event. One question that arose for the special edition editors was how Rust's four dimensions of experience might link to the four dimensions of the EES? Considering the EES based papers in this volume indicates that Rust's dimensions relate mainly to the affective and conative dimensions of the EES, and less to cognitive and novelty-related factors.

Alex Grebenar looked at the experience of house music events using 'Event Experience Mapping Model' (EEMM) methodology to capture individual's sensory and emotional 'immersion' in events. The approach consisted of a questionnaire survey and a self-completion 'Experience Matrix' which can then be completed by an individual to produce an individual 'Experience Map'. The online survey of house music followers generated a small number of responses, the mapping process enabled rich data to be generated. The analysis showed that co-presence, and in particular the experience of the 'crowd' was central to house music events. Being part of the crowd, or the music 'scene'

also helped to build participants' identities. There is also an interplay between engagement and subjective wellbeing, which Grebenar labels being 'lost in music', in which 'the place and space of the event become secondary to the cocktail of music and euphoric feeling'. This suggests there is also a shared experience or focus of attention that enhances the feeling of excitement or 'emotional energy' in the event, echoing ideas about IRC (Collins, 2014).

Jonathan Moss, Peter A. Whalley & Ian Elsmore examined the music festival experience using an interpretative phenomenological perspective, grounded in existential phenomenology. They used Descriptive Experience Sampling (DES) to capture participant experiences. They argue that empirical approaches are not appropriate for the generation of the theoretical insights required to deliver meaningful understanding of experiences, because they fail to deal with the meaning of experiences for individuals. They propose a model based on five areas of phenomenological interest: process; personal impact; authenticity; leveraging structures and event design. They use a DES approach for capturing experiences in real time, based on the experiential sampling method (ESM) developed by Csikszentmihalyi (1990), and employ Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis to analyze the data. Participants entered words, photographs, videos and voice recordings into an app on their smartphone during the event. Data entry was triggered by SMS messages, sent in such a way that interference with the experience itself was minimised.

Quantitative approaches

The presence of large numbers of visitors at events makes them ideal situations in which to conduct surveys for quantitative analysis. It is not surprising that quantitative methods have tended to dominate events research. A significant number of studies of event visitors began to appear in the 1980s, spurred on largely by the realisation that events could generate significant economic impacts for the host location (Davidson & Schaffer, 1980). Simple counting of visitor expenditure through surveys was replaced by more sophisticated approaches attempting to measure service quality in the 1990s (e.g. Crompton & Love, 1995). The use of surveys was also dictated by the disconfirmation paradigm of service quality, in which pre-event expectations were compared to the actual event experience. Many events were also studied in terms of the role of different aspects of experience in the motivation to attend events (Pegg & Patterson, 2010) and event outcomes such as satisfaction and intention to return (Kim et al., 2015). Globalisation also stimulated a growth in quantitative studies, which facilitated the comparison of measurements from different sites in different countries or continents. For example, the ATLAS Cultural Tourism Project conducted standardised surveys on the experience of cultural tourism sites and events globally from 1991 onwards (Richards, 2010). This model of collaborative research was extended to the events field when the ATLAS Events Group was founded in 2011, with first the ATLAS Events Monitoring Project, and later the ATLAS Events Experiences Project. Recently, there has been more extensive use made of mixed methods research to assess different aspects of the event experience (Packer & Ballantyne, 2011), also reflecting wider use of grounded theory approaches. The quantitative papers presented in this special issue reflect examples of comparative research conducted in the framework of the ATLAS research, as well as mixed

methods research on immersive events and a survey of sports events and their contribution to subjective well being.

Willem Coetzee and Shahab Pourfakhimi analyse the affective dimension of event experiences drawing on data from the ATLAS Event Experiences Project. They confirm the presence of the four basic dimensions of the EES (cognitive, conative, affective and novelty) for different types of events in different contexts, mirroring the results of Richards (2017, and this issue). In line with Collins's (2014) ideas about interaction rituals, they find excitement to be the most powerful predictor of behavioural intentions. This also provides some parallels to the findings of Armbrecht & Andersson in this issue regarding the importance of hedonic satisfaction in sports events.

Greg Richards applies the EES to seven cultural events in different countries with the aim of identifying generic dimensions of event experience. Visitor surveys were conducted using a standard questionnaire containing the original 18 EES items, as well as event outcomes and antecedents. Exploratory factor analysis indicated the presence of the four experience dimensions found in the original EES study (de Geus et al., 2016), with the cognitive dimension being strongest, followed by affective engagement, novelty and finally physical engagement. The experience of the event was found to be related to behavioural outcomes, such as intention to return and recommend, and the activities of participants on social media. For these cultural events, however, our findings contrasted with many previous studies that emphasise the primary role of affective experiences (Bastiaansen et al., 2019), as cognitive dimensions of experience were more important. It is suggested that cultural experiences are often more orientated towards contemplation and reflection in comparison with the sports events studied in this special issue by Armbrecht and Andersson, for example.

Abiola Sobitan and Peter Vlachos examine 'immersive events', a growing category within the range of event typologies that includes participatory theatre, interactive launch parties, 'escape rooms' and dress-up cinema. They develop a conceptual model with three elements: Interaction, Sensory experience, and Localisation. Via an online survey of immersive event experiences they address the questions of what drives people to attend an immersive event, the socio-demographic characteristics of immersive event attendees and how these characteristics affect event attendees' motivations? The analysis showed that experience elements related to novelty and entertainment scored highest. They also invited comments from respondents to cast more light on the figures, which provided illuminating information on affective responses, as well as more basic information on the high cost of immersive experiences. In contrast to many other studies, socialisation was not found to be an important element in immersive experiences. We might speculate that visitors to such events are immersed in their own experience, rather than seeking opportunities for socialisation.

John Armbrecht and Tommy D. Andersson ask the question what aspects of a sport event experience influence participants' happiness? They examine the relationship between subjective well-being (SWB), or happiness, and event experiences. They surveyed participants in different types of sports events (road cycling; a Half Marathon; a river swim; a cross country run; and a Nordic ski event) to construct a model to examine the effect of service quality, fun, flow, hedonic satisfaction, and eudemonic satisfaction on SWB as the dependent construct. They found that SWB is explained by hedonic satisfaction, which acts as a fully mediating variable for eudemonic satisfaction. This indicates

that hedonic satisfaction is on a higher hierarchical level and embraces eudemonic satisfaction. The authors suggest that that sport experiences allow participants to attain personal goals and gain eudemonic satisfaction, increasing self-respect and respect from others, resulting increased social status and therefore hedonic satisfaction. They point to the need for validated measurement scales for the concepts hedonic and eudemonic satisfaction.

Reflections on the process

Although we have labelled the papers in this special issue as either qualitative or quantitative, it is interesting that many of the studies presented here adopt mixed methods. These are not just combinations of qualitative and quantitative approaches, but also different forms of qualitative research (observation, interviews, visual methods) being put together to illustrate different facets of the experience. This underlines the complexity of the phenomena that researchers are trying to measure. This is also being increasingly recognised in quantitative approaches as well, because traditional one-shot surveys are being replaced or at least augmented by longitudinal surveys and comparisons of different types of events. In addition the analytical techniques being applied to the data are also advancing, with greater use of Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) and Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA), for example (van der Ark & Richards, 2013; Richards et al., 2020).

As Davies and Jaimangal-Jones point out in their contribution to this issue, the most important question is – what are we measuring experiences for? In this sense to the purposes of experience research have also moved on, from basic marketing and service quality aims to analysing the meaning and significance of event experiences. The deepening aims of event research seem also to have produced a turn towards qualitative and mixed methods.

One of the limitations of the journal article format was also apparent in the case of a project designed to highlight measurement methods and strategies. In many cases authors feel compelled to report detailed research results, leaving relatively little space to reflect on the appropriateness of the methods adopted, or to compare the data collected via different means. A book format seems to be better suited to such an enterprise, although sadly many researchers are currently less motivated to contribute to such projects.

Co-editing this special issue on event experience over the past two years has been ... well, let's say, eventful. Through the ATLAS events group we had discovered each other several years ago, one conducting research to create a scale to measure event experience and the other, using ethnographic participant observation, to contextualise the on-site real time behaviour of attendees at community festivals. We soon came to the realisation that there were many others undertaking similar pursuits, which would lead to this special issue intended to provide the reader with comparative examples of the contrasting styles of quantitative and qualitative research currently being conducted on the topic of event experience. While we want to recognise the many reviewers that volunteered their time and efforts through numerous revisions and re-submissions, we must also recognise so many researchers that submitted excellent abstracts making our initial decision of inclusion quite challenging. It appears this may be just the beginning of an avalanche of work on event experiences.

If only that had been the hard part, as the only Corona we were thinking of as we began to wrap this issue up in early 2020 was to be found in an icy bottle of beer on the beach. We, like everyone, had to deal with Covid 19 issues and it created some delays, but it did get us thinking about the impact articles in this issue may have. Nobody has enjoyed isolation or the cancellation of live events and, as we write, we do not know how soon things might return to normal. As they do however, people will be ready for and demanding the best event experiences of their lives. Our hope is this issue, and more research that is surely to follow, will provide valuable insight for event producers who will be making those best experiences available. After all, while people have progressed from wanting great products and services to wanting experiences, they are now also seeking those special experiences that will create senses of both individual and community well-being.

Fifty years ago Toffler (1970) 'shocked' us with his predictions of future experience makers and although his predictions of 'psyche-service industries and psych-corps' never materialised he was on target suggesting that experience makers would form a basic sector of the economy. We are now at the point of uncovering how to better measure and contextualise the meaning of those event experiences. Our future is eventful.

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