

TOWARDS AN AUSTRALIAN EVENT RESEARCH AGENDA: FIRST STEPS

ROB HARRIS,* LEO JAGO,† JOHNNY ALLEN,‡ and M. HUYSKENS*

*School of Leisure, Sport and Tourism, University of Technology, Sydney, Australia

†Centre for Hospitality and Tourism Research, Victoria University

‡Australian Centre for Event Management, University of Technology, Sydney

In Australia, the field of event research is relatively young and immature, lacking in consensus as regards research needs and priorities. This article, while not seeking to be prescriptive as regards such needs and priorities, aims to go some way towards laying the foundation upon which more rigorous efforts at establishing a research agenda in the area can be progressed. With this goal in mind, this article seeks first to chart the evolution of the event field in Australia to the point where research has a significant and acknowledged role in its future development. Following on from this discussion, the value to the field of an expanded and prioritized research effort will be considered along with recent preliminary efforts that have sought to progress efforts in this direction. The outcomes of an exploratory study of research priorities involving three broad stakeholder groups, namely, practitioners, government, and academics, will then be discussed. This study involved a review of existing literature to assist in identifying areas for inclusion in the study and as a basis for comparison of results. Outcomes from this study point, among other things, to differing research priorities among stakeholder groups and research "gaps" in current and proposed research efforts in the field.

Research agenda Research priorities Stakeholder groups

Special events have evolved in Australia to the point where their number, scale, and variety, combined with their associated economic, social, and cultural impacts, demand attention from researchers. To some extent, such attention has been forthcoming in recent years as the number of event texts, specialist event journals, and academic conferences dealing in full, or in part, with events has increased. Nonetheless, it is fair to say that research in the event field, particularly within the Australian context, is still in its infancy and that the issue

of establishing research agendas has only recently begun to emerge as a matter of some importance. This article begins by charting the development of the event field to the point where research has become a significant issue. It then moves on to discuss the value to the area of an expanded and prioritized research effort and briefly discusses recent attempts at generating such. The major focus of this article is an exploratory study of key stakeholders in event research. The intent of this study is to determine research priorities and differences

among each of these groups along with research "gaps" that may exist between present and proposed research efforts and identified needs. As part of this study, a review of existing literature in the area was conducted with a view to categorizing and quantifying event-related studies conducted in Australia and overseas. This process was designed to assist in identifying areas for inclusion in a questionnaire survey of stakeholders and in comparing results from this survey to current research efforts.

Overview of the Evolution of the Event Field in Australia

Increasing interest in special events by governments in Australia arguably derives from two events: the America's cup in Fremantle in 1983 and the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic games. Both these events demonstrated the power of events in the context of destination branding and, at least in the context of the latter, that large events could be conducted in a way that generated a surplus to the community where they took place. From the mid-1980s onward, greater efforts have been observed on behalf of state governments to develop the event area. Initially, such efforts came from a variety of departments including those associated with tourism, sport, and arts, but later specialized event agencies dedicated to the attraction of major special events were developed (McDonnell, Allen, & O'Toole, 1999).

Substantial competition now exists between states and territories in Australia to attract major events. This has, on occasions, led to full-scale bidding "wars." Victoria's successful efforts to lure the Formula One Grand Prix from Adelaide in the early 1990s is an example. With all states and territories now identifying events as an area where they have competitive advantage, competition is likely to increase rather than diminish in the future (Jago, 1997). It is also noteworthy that from the 1980s onwards, public spaces dedicated to celebrations and events began to appear in capital cities, specifically Darling Harbour (Sydney), Southbank (Brisbane), and Southgate (Melbourne), as did large convention and exhibition facilities (McDonnell et al., 1999).

The growth of special events in Australia can be observed by monitoring the size of the special event calendars that are produced by most states and territories. These calendars were introduced in the early 1990s and were generally published on an annual basis. They

moved from relatively small publications in each case to very substantial documents that were often out of date as soon as they were printed. For this reason, most states and territories no longer produce these calendars but rather keep an electronic list on their Web sites that can be kept up to date and more easily accessed by interested parties.

Accompanying the growth in special events has been the recognition that the event consumer is discerning and that the industry needs to establish and maintain high standards in terms of the quality of the products that are on offer. This has led to the introduction of training and accreditation programs by some organizations associated with the event industry. Such organizations include the International Special Events Society (ISES), New South Wales Festivals and Events Association (NSWFEEA), and the Meetings Industry Association of Australia (MIAA). Additionally, there has been rapid growth in the number of subjects and courses in the event area in universities and Technical and Further Education institutions (TAFEs). In a recent study by Harris and Jago (1999), it was found that 17 of Australia's 29 universities offered at least one subject in the event area and four universities offered specialization in the field. Two institutions, the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS) and Victoria University (VU), had specialist postgraduate programs in event management.

Given these developments, it is perhaps not surprising that event-related research has increased significantly in recent times. At the 1994 Council of Australian University Tourism and Hospitality Educators (CAUTHE) Conference, for example, there were no papers on special events. By 2000 there were over 20 such papers presented at this conference. It is also noteworthy that a subprogram dedicated to Special Event research has been included in the recently formed Co-operative Research Centre (CRC) for Sustainable Tourism. The number of conferences (7 since 1995) being conducted by industry associations and private bodies dealing in full, or in part, with various aspects of events is also symptomatic of a field that is professional and hungry for information (Harris & Jago, 1999).

The Value of an Event Research Agenda

From the previous discussion it can be seen that the event field is developing quickly in Australia, but, as Getz (2000) notes, it is still new and immature as an

area of academic study and therefore has much to gain from greater attention from researchers. Indicative of these gains are those identified by Lynch and Brown (1995, p. 11) when developing a research agenda for the not unrelated leisure field. Specifically, they noted that research helps to create efficient use of resources; assists in program planning; improves accountability; makes decision making transparent; promotes understanding of political, social, economic, and ecological contexts in which decisions are made; facilitates critique; reduces reliance on culturally inappropriate overseas research; and assists definition and promotion of an industry.

Many writers and organizations have lamented the lack of research in the event area and the subsequent benefits of such research. The Sydney Convention and Visitors Bureau (SCVB), in the context of the Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Exhibitions (MICE) sector, noted that research is "significantly deficient and must be improved" (Sydney Convention and Visitors Bureau, 1997, p. 116). Shaw and Davidson (2000), in introducing their study of Australian convention delegates, reinforce this view, stating that "the convention industry world wide and especially in Australia is under-researched." Commentary on public/special event research is less evident, which perhaps results from the organic and community-based nature of these types of events, difficulties in the definition of the term (Jago & Shaw, 1998), and lack of clear sectoral boundaries.

There have been some efforts in recent times to set research agendas in the event field; however, these have been essentially confined to the meetings, conference, and exhibitions area. In the context of the United States, Abbey and Link (1994) have produced a listing of operation and research needs for the conventions and meetings sector. Additionally, Cunningham and Taylor (1995) have compiled a research agenda for the area of event marketing. Masberg (1999), while not producing a research agenda as such, undertook an analysis of research priorities in US convention and visitor bureaus. In the Australian context, Carlsen (1999) proposed a research agenda for the conventions and exhibitions sector.

The Cooperative Research Centre for Sustainable Tourism (hereafter referred to as CRC Tourism) has been the most active agency in Australia in terms of developing and progressing a research agenda in the event field, although it should be stressed that its focus is limited to events within a tourism context. The CRC

Tourism contains within it a subprogram dedicated to event tourism research. The aim of the program is "the development of a strategic approach to understanding tourism special events, and the production of leading edge tourism special events research." Research priorities (in descending order from A to C) for this subprogram are given below. The high priority placed on the development of a research agenda to guide its future efforts should be noted.

Rating A

- Review the existing research and utilize industry networks as the basis for determining the research agenda for special events tourism.
- Identify best practice in the management of special events (including marketing, service quality, finance, and operations).
- Identify the role that special events can play in adding to the tourism sustainability of a destination.
- Identify the most effective means of disseminating research findings to industry and other researchers.

Rating B

- Develop tools to evaluate the economic, social, cultural, and environmental impacts of special events. This includes pre-event evaluation.
- Explore regional special events.
- Develop evaluation and management options for various categories of events (including sports events).

Rating C

- Develop a generic model of special events to guide the management and evaluation of special events.
- Identify the role that special events can play in branding a destination.

A detailed listing of current CRC projects is given in the Appendix of this article.

Exploratory Study

Literature Analysis

The purpose of the literature analysis was to provide broad insights into the areas of research that would later be included in a survey of stakeholder groups. Additionally, it sought to quantify the volume of research being undertaken within each of these areas. This latter consideration is significant from the perspective of de-

Table 1
Research Areas

Research Area	Number of Articles
Economic/financial impact	15
Marketing	13
Profile of festival/event	10
Sponsorship	10
Management	10
Trends and forecasts	4
Total	62

Source: Formica (1998).

termining where emphasis is currently being placed by researchers and the extent to which such emphasis is in line with the perceived needs of stakeholders.

Formica (1998) partly addressed the challenge posed by the literature analysis dimension of this study when he examined three major tourism mainstream journals over the period 1970–1996 as well as the journal *Festival Management & Event Tourism* (1993–1996). His intention was to identify major research themes. His findings (see Table 1) point to the domi-

nance of economic/financial impacts, and marketing and its associated concerns with sponsorship and event profile. He observed that relatively little research had been conducted regarding sociopsychological issues and events and that more research was needed in the areas of event management (including human resources), events in a global context, and cross-cultural matters.

While useful, Formica's study is somewhat limited in scale and scope. In order to provide a more detailed perspective on research efforts in the area, this study drew on two recent event bibliographies. The first of these (Burkhardt & Harris, 1998) deals with the period 1980–1998 and is international in scope. The second (Allen, Harris, & Huyskens, 2000) deals only with the Australian context and encompasses the period 1980–2000. It should be noted that there is some overlap between these two publications in terms of inclusions (e.g., journal articles, reports, studies) and that neither can purport to be all-inclusive in its listings. The categories used in Table 2 emerged from an effort by the writers of this article to identify distinct and meaningful areas of research focus.

Table 2
Bibliography Content Analysis

Research Area	Australian % of Articles	International % of Articles
Events and economic development/economic impact of events	26.3	14.4
General management/administration/logistics	12.6	8.0
Community impacts, resident attitudes and perceptions of event impacts, community development	10.0	3.8
Historical perspectives/event descriptions	7.7	3.8
Visitor/participant/audience motives and demographics	6.3	8.4
Sponsorship and event marketing	9.8	24.6
Volunteers	4.2	3.0
Event tourism	4.2	1.2
Education, training, accreditation, professionalism	3.5	1.0
Spectator behavior	2.8	3.8
Events as aspects of the arts/culture/heritage	2.8	2.8
Research issues/event terminology	2.8	1.2
Environmental issues	2.1	0.2*
Fundraising	1.4	10.3
Sociological/anthropological/psychological analysis	1.4	2.5
Law/risk management/taxation/security and safety	0.7*	2.6
Urban renewal and events	0.7	2.6
General descriptive analyses of the festival sector	0.7	1.0
Politics, policy, and planning	0	2.2
Customer service/service quality	0	1.4
Attendance estimates and forecasts	0	1.0
Events and authenticity	0	0.2
Total number of articles	143	494

*This represents one article. Source: Burkhardt and Harris (1998); Allen, Harris, and Huyskens (2000).

Combining the results from the two bibliographies, it would appear that issues associated with economic development and impacts, sponsorship and marketing, general management/administration/logistics, and event market studies are presently the dominant research areas in the event field.

Stakeholder Survey

Aim and Objectives

The aim of this component of the study was to determine research needs and priorities within the events sector. A range of stakeholder groups was identified for this purpose, specifically:

- metropolitan event organizations;
- regional event organizations;
- event organizers;
- tourist commissions;
- local government associations/councils;
- state government event agencies;
- industry associations;
- academics.

In the context of the groups selected, this survey sought to:

- identify research needs;
- determine the relative importance of identified research needs; and
- determine differences in research priorities.

Approach

A series of "expert" interviews was conducted with nine individuals from within the chosen groups. These interviews were designed to provide insights into research issues and perspectives within each of the stakeholder categories. Based on these responses and insights gained from the literature analysis, a survey instrument was designed that involved a series of open-ended questions. This was then sent out to a further 32 targeted individuals with the objective of producing "top of mind" perspectives on research needs and priorities. Nine useable responses were returned (a 28% response rate). Insights gained from this survey, along with those from in-depth interviews and the prior literature analysis, were then used to develop a detailed questionnaire that listed some 85 areas of potential research. Scope was also provided for respondents to add to this list. For convenience, topics were grouped under broad

headings (e.g., marketing, risk/legal issues). The following 4-point rating scale was used: 1 = not at all necessary, 2 = desirable but not essential, 3 = essential, 4 = no opinion/not sure.

The sample for the survey was drawn from a variety of sources. First, state and territory event calendars were consulted, along with event agency staff in each state, to identify events that were appropriate to survey. Essentially, the goal was to obtain a mix of urban and regional events with varying attendance levels. A minimum of 2000 attendees was set as the cutoff level for inclusion in the sample, while no upper limit was set. The final number of events included in the survey was 150, of which approximately 60% were metropolitan and 40% regional. Four industry associations were identified and included in the sample (i.e., South Australian Festival and Events Association, International Special Events Society, Meetings Industry Association of Australia, and the New South Wales Festival and Events Association). Additionally, the membership lists of these associations were used to identify 50 full-time event organizers. All state and territory event agencies and tourist commissions were included in the sample, as were all state-based local government associations. Australian academics with an interest in the event field were identified by reference to published articles and/or involvement with the event subprogram of the CRC Tourism.

The questionnaire was piloted using representatives from each stakeholder group and then distributed. In total, 242 questionnaires were sent by mail. A reminder card was mailed to all survey participants prior to the submission date and at least one reminder phone call was made to those who failed to submit by this time. Collectively, these activities resulted in the return of 133 usable questionnaires (a 55% response rate).

Analysis

The relatively small sample, combined with the large number of variables in the study (84), precludes any advanced statistical analysis of results. For example, an Exploratory Factor Analysis was conducted, but the face validity of the extracted factors was not high. Nonetheless, a number of observations can be made based on an analysis of survey responses.

Of the 84 items listed, 25 were found to have mean values in excess of 2.5. Of the top 5 items in the survey in terms of mean values, the first item concerned "rea-

sons for event failure," the second was "needs and motives of patrons," and the other three concerned various aspects of sponsorship. The least important items related to "attendee purchasing opportunities," "export of event expertise," "queuing," and "volunteer development."

The small final sample size resulted in the decision to "group" stakeholders into three categories for the purposes of analysis. Before undertaking this task, responses were examined to determine if this process would serve to disguise significant differences between grouped stakeholders. This was not found to be the case. The groups used were as follows:

Group 1: Practitioners ($N = 76$ or 57%)

- Metro events
- Regional events
- Event organizers
- Industry associations

Group 2: Government ($N = 45$ or 34%)

- Local government associations
- Event agencies/tourist commissions

Group 3: Academics ($N = 12$ or 9%)

ANOVAs were employed to determine if any differences in research priorities between the three groupings could be identified. Of the 85 items, *Practitioners* rated 61 items as more important than did *Government*. There were 20 items that *Academics* rated more highly than either of the other two groups; however, results for this group are based on a very small sample size.

Statistically significant differences (at the 95% level) were found between the various groups on the following items:

- Market segmentation/target markets Practitioners highest
- Needs and motives Practitioners highest
- Sponsorship decisions Practitioner highest
- Merchandising strategies Practitioner highest
- Valuing the events industry Government highest
- Volunteer motivation/satisfaction Academic highest
- Ticketing methods and strategies Academics highest
- Purchasing opportunities Practitioners highest
- Media effectiveness Practitioner highest
- Volunteer training Practitioner

Table 3 shows that there were substantial differences between the 10 items that were rated as most important by the three groups. Briefly, at the other end of the scale, the three groups rated the following issues as least important:

- Practitioners: export of event management expertise, attendee purchasing opportunities, and accreditation
- Government: attendee purchasing opportunities, ticketing, and queuing
- Academics: attendee purchasing opportunities, ambush marketing, and impacts of GST

Discussion

The outcomes of this study appear consistent with conventional wisdom. Practitioners, as would be expected, are more concerned with matters associated with the business aspects of events, particularly marketing, sponsorship, and general event management (including why events fail). Research concerns of Government

Table 3
The Ten Items Rated Most Important by the Three Groups

Ranking	Practitioner	Government	Academics
1	Sponsorship decision process	Reasons for event failure	Risk management strategy formulation
2	Needs and motivations of attendees	Identification of risk management factors	Valuing the events industry
3	Market segmentation	Standardized research tools and methodologies	Reasons for event failure
4	Valuing sponsorship	Valuing the events industry	Event strategy formulation
5	Optimizing sponsorship	Optimizing sponsorship	Tools to assess economic impact
6	Reasons for event failure	Trends and forces in event management	Packaging events
7	Media effectiveness	Event strategy formulation	Internet promotion
8	Internet promotion	Tools to assess economic impact	Trends associated with different event types
9	The management process and events	Event feasibility process	Trends and forces in event management
10	Effectiveness of promotional strategies	Valuing sponsorship	Industry training needs

relate largely to matters associated with risk management, event failure, event feasibility, strategy formulation, and economic impact assessment. These findings likely stem from Government's direct involvement in the events sector in Australia. This involvement may come in various forms, including event organizer (as was largely the case with the Sydney Olympic Games), tourism development and event bidding agency, sponsor, grant provider, and builder of event-specific infrastructure. The capacity for events to enhance or compromise a government's future electoral chances may also account for its desire to understand both the "upside" and "downside" of engagement with a specific event. Additionally, as a developing sector of the Australian economy, valuation of the area and a concern regarding trends and forces that may affect its future growth are also understandable government research priorities. Academics would appear to have similar research concerns to those of the Government group. This may reflect the fact that their agenda is influenced by government research funding agencies and their priorities (such as the CRC Tourism). It may also be the case that academics are responding to what they perceive as the major challenges faced by a significant emerging field of study. It is also noteworthy, and perhaps understandable, that this group was the only one to acknowledge the significance of training to the area's future development. This point is particularly significant when it is remembered that accreditation (which could reasonably be assumed to have a significant training dimension) was given an extremely low rating by the Practitioner group. The reason for this is unclear and requires further research. Finally, limited overlap exists between the research priorities of Academics and those of Practitioners. This "gap" would appear to signal that academics might need to adjust their research orientation if their activities are to be seen as relevant by practitioners.

When the research priorities of the three groups are compared with research that has already taken place in the area, there is a fair measure of agreement; however, there are some notable differences. Significantly, risk and the reasons for event failure would appear to have received little attention in the literature to date, yet both were significant research concerns for two of the three groups surveyed. Additionally, other areas noted as research priorities but that are not in evidence in the bibliographies examined, or are the subject of only a few studies, are: the Internet and events; approaches to valu-

ing the events industry; the event feasibility process; and the strategic planning of events.

Conclusion

Presently, the focus of researchers in the field of event research would appear to lie in a limited range of areas centered on the economic, marketing, and management dimensions of events. This orientation would seem to reflect a dominant view of events as economic development tools or as "products" to be managed and sold to potential attendees, sponsors, or other financial supporters. Many other potential areas of research concern remain little explored. This focus on the economic, management, and marketing aspects of events is unlikely to change significantly in Australia based on the research priorities of the key stakeholder groups identified in this article, although risk management and the area of event failure are likely to feature more prominently in the future.

While still a young and immature field of study from a research perspective, there is likely to be an increasing volume of research being generated in the Australian context. The CRC Tourism and its event subprogram, along with the development of a biannual conference dealing with event research (to be funded by the CRC Tourism and the Australian Centre for Event Management, University of Technology, Sydney) are testimony to this. Insights into the directions that such research should take have been provided in this article. The findings here, however, should not be considered definitive due to the exploratory nature of the study on which they are based. Nonetheless, they should provide a useful starting point for a more detailed and expansive effort aimed at generating a research agenda for the event field in Australia.

Appendix: CRC Projects in Events Tourism

Projects that are being undertaken under the auspices of the subprogram in Event Tourism (Cooperative Research Centre for Sustainable Tourism, 2000).

The economic impact of local and regional arts festival. This project plans to investigate appropriate models for the evaluation of smaller regional arts festivals and events.

A study of convention delegates: marketing and survey research aspects. This study intends to address ways convention management may be enhanced. The project aims to design a survey instrument for the convention sector that will

ensure optimal data collection. It will act as a preliminary investigation into the economic impact of conventions.

Host destination convention site selection: discrete choice modeling scoping study. The purpose of the project is to develop an understanding of the factors that play a pivotal role in determining how associations choose a convention site. The study is particularly interested in understanding the relative role of a wide range of factors by exploring the tradeoffs that association meeting planners make when assessing alternative sites.

Generic event evaluations: the case of two ACT events—Floriade and FAI Car Rally. This project will develop and extend current methodologies that have been used in the ACT to evaluate events into a template style methodology that can easily be implemented by event organizers. It aims to provide reliable and accurate estimates of the direct and secondary economic impacts of events, along with indicators of satisfaction with the event, sponsors, and visitor behavior.

Managerial decision making in tourism special events: the development of models through a longitudinal study. This project will emphasize the need to identify and address general management issues associated with tourism special events.

Leveraging hallmark events for flow-on tourism: lessons from the Olympics. This project examines destination strategies intended to leverage the Olympic Games for tourism. Data will be used to formulate general models of leveraging tactics, and the requisites for their effective implementation.

The convention sector: a longitudinal study of marketing, economic and survey research aspects. This project addresses the issues surrounding decisions such as where conventions are held, how travel arrangements are made for delegates (including reservation systems), what activities are considered for social, cultural, and other programs, how delegates decide to travel before and after conventions, what the economic impacts of conventions are, and how yield from them can be increased.

The Sydney Olympics and international visitor behavior. This project involves adding a small series of questions to the questionnaire used by the Bureau of Tourism Research's international visitor survey, to help examine the impact of the Sydney Olympic Games on tourism visitation to Australia. This project will encompass tourism from 1999 to 2002, and investigates the influence of various forms of marketing information about the Olympics on various tourists.

The Sydney Olympics: corporate sponsorship and tourist market development. The aim of this project is to understand the dynamics of one of the major markets that will be created by the Sydney Games by examining the role played by Olympic sponsors.

Under Program One, Environmental Management, and within the subprogram of Mountain Tourism, there is a further research project on events and festivals.

Events and festivals: ensuring economic sustainability in mountain areas. This project aims to develop a methodology that can be used by local councils or associations in mountain areas to simply, accurately, and cost-effectively calculate the direct and secondary economic impacts of festivals and events in their region.

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