

**A Phenomenological Investigation into the Construction of Event Meaning: the
BMX Racing Events Case.**

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Abstract: This doctoral research working paper proposes the investigation of event meaning creation by means of a phenomenological research method. It puts forward the notion that event meaning constructed is based on the event form, historical development and the experiences created by and through the event. Based on research in progress, the value of this working paper lies in the identification of gaps in the literature, the lack of empirical evidence that would justify the assertions made by popular event management academic books and the lack of academic data on the influence of events' historical development for a more thorough understanding of event meaning and its construction.

Keywords: Experiences; Meaning; Social Constructivism; Phenomenology; Phenomenographic research.

Experience theme: Creation and co-creation of event experiences through meaning construction.
Focus of Paper: Theoretical / Academic / Doctoral Research Working Paper.

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Introduction

Event tourism research, as a relatively new area of academic study, has been rather narrow in scope and mostly focused on event planning. Researchers in the field (Formica, 1998; Weed 2005, 2006; Holloway, Brown, & Shipway, 2010) contend it would benefit from longitudinal, multi-disciplinary and diverse research. A review of the literature undertaken by Getz (2008, p.415) from 2000 is particularly relevant and calls for research into event meaning and “a deeper look into the experiential realm through anthropological methods like participant observation, phenomenology and experiential sampling”.

Meaning in Event Tourism Literature

The literature review for this research is based on Getz’s (2008) review of Event Studies but has been supplemented with journal articles until 2004. Not only is the current event academic journal articles literature concentrated within the event form theme, and to a lesser degree on event experiences and design, but the same narrow scope is also observed in event management academic textbooks. A review of the sample of current course books (Allen, Harris & O’Toole, 2010); (Bowdin, O’Toole & Allen, 2010); (Shone & Parry, 2010); (Goldblatt, 2005); (Tassiopoulos, 2010) and (Van der Wagen & White, 2010) shows that there is considerable writing on the relationship between tourism and sports events from both demand and supply sides, but that it is mostly focused on event planning and/or destination development through economic or marketing lenses. Within those textbooks, some aspects of event experiences and design are present, but mostly limited to event concept and planning. Two exceptions are Getz (2012) and Berridge (2007), the former of particular relevance to this study. Most importantly, there seems to be no empirical evidence research that establishes the validity and reliability of event form, and historical elements and their influence [or lack of] to event experience and meaning construction or how they influence what events mean to participants, organisers and attendees.

Research Overview

The review has enabled the conjectural formulation of the research elements. Event meaning is believed to be constructed by the relationship of three themes, i.e. event form, history and experience as shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Theme Clusters of Event Meaning

A further review of the literature was undertaken to search for elements within those themes that might reveal the essence of the clusters (Ziakas & Boukas, 2014) to be empirically tested as part of the doctoral research that this working paper is based on, as outlined in Table 1.

Event History	Antecedents	Event history Historical patterns and trends	
	Planning and Production	Event evolution and lifecycle Event changes in planning and design	(Getz, 1993; 2012); (Beverland et al., 2001)
	Processes and Patterns	History reflected through event Evolution of event in different cultures	
Event Form	Setting	Location Theme Design	(Bowdin et al., 2010); (Berridge, 2007); (Brown & James, 2004)
	People	Organisers Attendees Participants	
	Management	Systems Programme Service	
Event Experience	Conative	Behaviour Physical activity Involvement Participation	(Chen, 2006); (Berridge, 2014); (Ziakas & Boukas, 2014); (Getz, 2012)
	Affective	Feelings and emotions Motivations Preferences Values	
	Cognitive	Awareness Perception Learning Judgment Understanding	

Table 1. Elements of the Event Meaning Clusters (adapted from the sources given)

Given the nature of the problem and the duality of the affirmations made, that event meaning indeed evolves around three themes and the validity of the elements within each theme, the research calls for a multiple-methods approach. As such, three hypotheses have been put forward.

- Hypothesis 1: The elements of the clusters are valid;
- Hypothesis 2: There are other factors to be added as elements to each cluster;
- Hypothesis 3: Meaning formation involves the inter-relationship of each and all the elements of the clusters.

By means of quantitative data collection and analysis, the three hypotheses given will be tested. These, however, do not necessarily answer the question 'how event meaning is constructed' and as such, qualitative data collection methods will also be used involving the analysis of interview content, thus reinforcing Holloway, Brown and Shipway's (2010, p. 75) "advocacy for more experience-related studies within a qualitative research approach". The above should enable triangulation and data comparison amongst the three sets, the exploration of the relationship between event experience, event format and event history in the construction of event meaning and provide substantial evidence to enable a scientifically argued account of the phenomenon of BMX event meaning construction.

Methodological Considerations

Methodologically, this research is founded on three 'worldviews'; constructivism, pragmatism and phenomenology. Constructivist on the assumption that meanings are constructed by human beings through a process that is based not only on event form and experience, but on historical and social perspectives (Simpson, 1982 in Crotty, 1998) and that meaning can be established scientifically by observation, experiment and comparison. Pragmatic in a sense that it also provides a philosophical basis for the research that is not committed to one system (method), and that "the overall strength of the study is greater than either of the strategies of inquiry" [quantitative or qualitative] (Creswell, 2009, p.4). Phenomenological, as a line of thought, in so far as it deals with the examination and the meanings of specific "phenomena as they are experienced and perceived" (Ziakas & Boukas, 2014, p.61).

Phenomenology, a philosophical movement founded by Husserl (1859-1938), as method, allows for the examination of specific "phenomena" [in this case of meaning perception, acknowledgment or creation] based on conscious action. It enables the analysis of subjective components of consciousness, those needed to conceive meaning, into conscious, 'lived' experience, intentionality and reflection (Macann, 1993). It also accounts for the examination of consciousness in a process that involves personal and social constructs (Ziakas & Boukas, 2014), a particular characteristic of events. Phenomenology is not a new concept in event tourism. It has been applied in the investigation of tourist experiences (Andriotis, 2009); (E. Cohen, 1979); (Pernecky & Jamal, 2010); (Chen, 2006); (Hayllar & Griffin, 2005); (Li, 2000), amongst others. Berridge (2014) and Ziakas and Boukas (2014), for example, explored event experiences and event meaning, the latter seeking to contextualise phenomenology in the study of meaning of events. The fact that recent papers are moving towards the understanding of event experiences and meaning using qualitative methods is an indication how topical and timely the research proposal is. Data will be collected on and off site over a one-year period using qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. Phenomenological studies, using "purposive sampling" (Kumar, 2011, p.206) tend to use small samples, usually between three and six participants (Smith, et al., 2009, p.51). Quantitative data collection is expected from a sample size between 267 and 375 to be representative of the estimated BMX racing population. The sample size considers $\pm 5\%$ precision level where confidence Level is 95% and $P=5$ based on a total population of between 800 to 6,000, these numbers to be confirmed during a pilot study in 2005 prior to data collection stage. The research site might be extended from national to international races pending funding and sponsorship.

BMX Racing Events

The study population of BMX racing events is particularly useful for the study for various reasons. First, BMX racing has its origins in the 60s and had its first organised event in November 1970 in Long Beach, California. Despite its young age, it became an Olympic sport in the Beijing Games in 2008. This timespan would facilitate the evaluation of historical constructs given BMX racing events founders and forebears are still around to 'tell the tale'. Second, additionally to similar characteristics to most events, such as attendees (as spectators and participants), planned organisation and management, etc., BMX racing have specific characteristics that not all events have such as influence of parents in the sport, the amateur nature of the sport (with a few exceptions at the elite level), etc. Organisationally, BMX events can be compared to motorsports events such as motocross and car racing events, only on a smaller scale. Competitions are held at the local, regional, national and international levels and a "travelling circus-like" community is responsible for keeping it alive.

The Next Steps

A pilot study will be undertaken between March and September 2015 with the full data collection in 2016 following the BMX Racing calendar. This article is based on the registered and approved doctoral research programme.

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