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The Hope and Glory Festival

A festival of failure

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Introduction

Events have become an integral element of public policy and place making in the last 20 years with numerous towns and cities looking to capitalise from the positive impacts that they can deliver – economic, regeneration, socio-cultural and political (Foley *et al.*, 2012). Whilst there are many successes in embedding events within public policy there are also failures. The Hope and Glory Festival in 2017 is an excellent example of how events fail.

In order to appreciate this festival's unique failings it is critical to first establish an understanding of how events have become an integral element within public policy, by acting as a driver of social, cultural, and economic development in towns and cities, such as Liverpool. In the case of Liverpool, this shift coincided with the city hosting the European Capital of Culture (hereafter 'ECOC') in 2008 and meant that as a result, the administration and management of events changed significantly in the city, as the local authority sought to build on the success of the ECOC by making events much easier to stage. However, as a result of widening the opportunity for event production, the need for administrative oversight to ensure quality and safety becomes paramount. This can only happen if such administrative oversight occurs and functions within an organizational structure that has clearly defined roles and responsibilities. This is vital, because it is this structure that provides the foundation for the effective organization of resources on which the successful implementation of each event relies.

Using the Hope and Glory Festival that occurred in Liverpool, UK, in August 2017, this chapter will show the critical role that incorporating a mode of evaluation at the initial planning stage plays, when creating a successful event. As this case study makes clear, developing a clear and centralised focus of responsibility and clear lines of communication, were critical elements that were overlooked.

Global shifts and the importance of events in place marketing

From the early 1990s onwards, academics generally and those working across the social sciences more specifically, began to theorise political-economic shifts predicated on a neoliberal restructuring of capital occurring at a global level, which they sought to describe using concepts such as the ‘network society’ and the ‘knowledge economy’ (Castells, 1996a; Drucker, 1993). One important consequence of these macro-level shifts captured most clearly within these works, was a new emphasis that such changes placed on cities (Castells, 2000). As capital was able to move more freely than ever before across the boundaries of nation-states, urban centres became vital, operating as inter-connected ‘nodes’, key points through which global capital now flowed (Castells, 1996b, 2000). In order to be able to take advantage of all of the potential benefits that such shifts proved able to offer, cities increasingly became pushed into competition with one other.

This was especially true in urban centres that had not previously been considered to be essential locations of global finance, as places like Frankfurt (Germany), Manchester (UK), and Toronto (Canada) now jostled alongside former centres of colonial and post-colonial power, like London, Paris and New York. One perhaps unintended consequence of these shifts, was that events increasingly became a key part of public policy and more specifically, of contemporary economic and social regeneration initiatives (Foley *et al.*, 2012). This is because events were able to offer a form of tangible distinction and difference to place-marketing narratives, which became ever more important as cities sought to differentiate themselves from other similar locations (Bærenholdt & Haldrup, 2006; Frey, 2009; Richards, 2014). Within the UK, this repositioning of events at the heart of government policy at both a local and national level, has perhaps been nowhere more important than it has been to Liverpool (Foley *et al.*, 2012). This stemmed from the positive economic, social, and cultural impacts of events on places such as Manchester and Glasgow, due to the success of hosting major and mega events such as the Commonwealth Games (Manchester, 2002) and Capital of Culture (Glasgow, 1990). Liverpool was therefore keen to capitalise on the opportunities that events could create for repositioning the city, particularly from an economic and social-cultural perspective, and its successful bid for the European Capital of Culture 2008 was critical to this (Foley *et al.*, 2012). The importance of events and place-making, and their incorporation within public policy has more recently been reflected in the success of the Olympics (London, 2012), hosting the Commonwealth Games (Glasgow, 2014 and Birmingham 2022), and the UK City of Culture (Hull, 2017 and Coventry 2021).

There is little doubt that from the end of the 1970s and through the 1980s, the era associated with the rising political fortunes of Margaret Thatcher, Liverpool suffered enormously. In the face of multiple economic recessions – and not least the (second) global economic oil crisis in 1979, the Conservative government