5 Cultural Impacts

Learning objectives

- ☐ Learn the meaning of culture and the aims of cultural impact assessment
- ☐ Understand the subjects and objects of cultural impact assessment for events and tourism
- ☐ Be able to implement a CIA process suitable for events and tourism
- ☐ Know what methods are especially appropriate for CIA and how to use them
- ☐ Understand the importance of consultation in SIA and CIA

5.1 Introduction

Cultural impact assessment (CIA) is often combined with social impacts, but there are often very good reasons for a separate approach. CIA is especially relevant for festivals and cultural celebrations, and any event featuring ethnic, indigenous and multicultural themes, or events and tourism located in sensitive cultural communities.

This chapter starts with definitions of culture and its elements, leading to an overview of the main related themes found in the tourism and event literature. A set of goals, related methods and key impact indicators is presented as a way to begin thinking about cultural impact assessment. The process and methods of CIA is then detailed, incorporating concepts and methods from earlier chapters.

5.2 Definition, and elements of culture

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2002) defined culture as

"the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs".

As to the elements of culture to be considered in impact assessment, with many related specifically to native/aboriginal groups or well-defined ethnicities, the UNESCO list of 'intangible heritage' is useful.

"The term 'cultural heritage' has changed content considerably in recent decades, partially owing to the instruments developed by UNESCO. Cultural heritage does not end at monuments and collections of objects. It also includes traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants, such as oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts."

(Source: https://ich.unesco.org/en/what-is-intangible-heritage-00003)

5.2.1 Events, tourism and cultural impacts

Anthropologists have traditionally studied the nature and important roles of rituals, festivals and events in human cultures (e.g. van Gennep, 1909; Turner, 1969; Falassi, 1987), and also with regard to negative impacts on culture. Enduring themes include 'acculturation' through host-guest interactions (e.g., see Nunez in the classic book *Hosts and Guests*, edited by Valene Smith, 1989), where interacting cultures begin to share elements and a weaker culture might lose its identity. It is often heard that tourism can 'commodify' events and rituals for commercial gain, thereby damaging cultural 'authenticity' (e.g., Greenwood, 1972; Shaw and Williams, 2004).

Events can be viewed either as agents of change or manifestations of important cultural components, or both. And following the logic of Greenwood (1989) who re-thought his critique by noting the importance of cultural evolution, and of Cohen (1988) who described 'emergent authenticity' in the context of how new events can evolve into authentic traditions, we have to conclude that a static view of impacts should never be taken. Planned events, tourism and culture evolve together.

It is generally believed that searching for 'authentic' experiences is a hallmark of the experience economy (see Gilmore and Pine, 2007) but the search for authenticity is a theme made popular by earlier theorists like Goffman (1959) and MacCannell (1973, 1976), and it has been the subject of much debate. Are people disappointed when they do not find authentic cultural experiences? Do they even know what they are? Without interpretation, many event experiences that have local meaning will only be entertainment to outsiders. Accordingly, when IA searches for impacts on authenticity, definition and measurement become critical.

Scholars have noted the importance of authenticity to special-interest groups such as 'foodies' (Getz et al., 2014). Quinn (2013) described authenticity as a key concept in event management, although it should be remembered that many planned events do not attempt to provide cultural experiences or meanings. Being authentic means different things to people. To a museum curator it often means 'original' or 'unchanged'. But according to Richards (2007), residents are

more likely to emphasize familiar cultural norms like traditions and language, and visitors might emphasize their own enjoyment and socializing when it comes to defining what is an authentic experience.

Both positives and negatives can be identified, with lots of grey areas, and there will almost always be different value perspectives – both on the perception of impacts and their importance. Those stressing economic development often appear to downplay the negative cultural impacts of events and tourism, while festival producers are usually engaged in fostering one or more cultural benefits – from arts development to multi-cultural inclusiveness. Cultural impacts will certainly come to the fore when ethnic, native and minority groups are involved as participants, organisers or host communities. By way of example, Whitford and Ruhanen (2013) conducted a sociocultural analysis of an Australian indigenous event.

In *Eventful Cities* (Richards and Palmer, 2010, pp. 359-364) the European Cities of Culture programme is discussed, for which a number of indicators have been developed for assessing cultural impacts:

♦   Participation (e.g., audience and tourist data; increased access for all residents)

♦   Collaboration between cultural organisations (i.e., synergistic effects)

♦   Levels of cultural production (e.g., number of cultural enterprises)

♦   Changes in cultural funding (both public and sponsorship)

♦   Number of new creations (plays, music, books, etc.).

The arts community is diverse, and each form of art (e.g., visual, performing, written) will have a different set of goals and indicators to be assessed. Artists want opportunities to innovate, perform and earn money. Fostering arts appreciation is a general goal, and many arts agencies are interested in making international links. Keep in mind that outputs (e.g., attendance and ticket revenues, numbers of performances, amounts of grants received) are easier to measure and are not long-term impacts.

Meyrick (2015, p. 102) argued for a 'total cultural value' approach, saying:

"The aim of the Total Cultural Value assessment exercise is to capture as many proofs of worth as possible and turn these into descriptions – numerical or verbal – that best represent the value of a cultural activity to its communities (not just the present community, but also past and future communities). The aim is not to make assessment of culture easier for either organisations or government agencies. In fact, it may make it harder." The evidence is to be reported by cultural organisations, including events, as their best expression of worth, being its value to various communities or stakeholders. This would consist of: (a) historical data, including its mission and evolution as well as attendance and financial figures; (b) peer reviews (as evidence of esteem, authenticity, and impact; (c) responses by patrons and the community (tourism figures, sales, endorsements, satisfaction, experiences); (d)