

Cases for Event Management and Event Tourism

Questions and answers for analysis

Chapter 6

Q1. What are some key characteristics of transgressive behaviour at Roskilde Festival and festival events more generally as described in the case and the presented literature?

A: In the case of Roskilde Festival, it seems that what one group of people may consider playful acts simultaneously constitute what other people find transgressive. Examples include games played in the tent camp site such as young men rating the looks of random women passing by or beer bowling with its 'tigermis' rule that gives players carte blanche to tackle people who otherwise are not part of the game and, thus, not in on the fun. As such, transgressive behaviour is characterised not only by playfulness, but also a degree of involuntariness, that is, lack of consent. It is reproduced, normalised, and, hence, legitimised through the tradition and rituals that make up these pastime activities yet also includes instances of, for example, inappropriate touching during concerts at the festival site. The case distinguishes between three types of behaviours that are experienced as transgressive by the interviewed festival participants. These relate to 1) bodily boundaries, 2) sound/noise (e.g., playing loud music on speaker early in the morning when everybody else in the tent area are trying to get a few hours of sleep), and 3) trash (e.g., the experience of living in a garbage dump and witnessing other people tossing empty cans (beer, mackerel, etc.) in your camp. Another way of making sense of the different forms of transgressions is to think of transgressive behaviour along a continuum with, on the one end, sexual assault, rape, and other forms of physical violence that are clearly illegal and should be reported to authorities; and on the other end behaviours that by most people in general society would be deemed inappropriate, disrespectful, and indecent, but which are not criminalised (e.g., objectification, sexist language, etc.).

Q2. Why is transgressive behaviour becoming a safety problem that event organisers need to be able to address, and how does it differ from 'classic' (crowd) safety management problems?

A: Critical studies claim that festival events do not subvert gendered power dynamics but, rather, reproduce and even enhance their enactment with gender-based violence as a result. While crowd safety for years has been the primary focus of event safety research and practice, transgressive behaviour has in recent years become a safety concern due to incidents of (sexual) transgressions repeated across several events. This development has led to a change in perception among some organisers from viewing transgressive behaviour mostly as individual incidents of criminal acts with the implication that rape and other incidents of violence should be reported, after which the police were to take care of the problem. Transgressive behaviour was as such not seen as a symptom of a wider event safety issue, nor as symptomatic of the event design and culture. Today, movements such as #Metoo have shifted public opinion and perspectives so that it is broadly acknowledged that reported incidents might only represent the tip of the iceberg.

Q3. Taking inspiration from the methodological approach in the case, how can you study the phenomenon of transgressive behaviour in (festival) event contexts – and with which ethical considerations?

A: If wanting to inquire about experiences with transgressive behaviour you can interview participants. In an inductive and exploratory study such as the one in the case, you should refrain from using and imposing predefined understandings of transgressive behaviour as this is likely to exclude alternative understandings that participants might share. Asking open-ended questions, however, comes with the risk of interviewees responding based on an availability bias, delimiting their answers to a recent experience as this is most salient to them, however, at the expense of sharing other insights of potentially equal relevance to your study. If your research interest is not people's experiences and how they make sense of these experiences, then an option is to observe people's behaviours and interactions in specific situations. As documentation you may take fieldnotes, writing thick descriptions where you jot down as much information as possible without being normative in terms of what is important and why things transpire. You can also take pictures and use video. When conducting interviews, informed consent is a must. Interviewees must be informed of their rights, for example to withdraw from the study at any time but should also know of your research aim for them to decide whether they want to participate. A dilemma in this regard is that potential interview candidates in a festival context are likely under the influence of alcohol and perhaps even other drugs. And in getting access to certain groups of interviewees you might have to accept if offered to drink a beer with the group so as not to appear too much as an outsider with the risk of respondents holding back. Research ethics also pertain to (having a plan for) dealing with the psychological impact on you and your team from being exposed, repeatedly, to (stories of) extreme situations, interviewees reacting with strong emotions and, perhaps, in need of professional help to process, etc.

Q4. What does it entail to approach transgressive behaviour as a 'wicked' problem?

A: That problem is wicked means that there is no single or absolute solution that will fix the problem once and for all. Moreover, the wickedness of a problem reminds us that a solution is always only a solution to a specific problem, which is another way of saying that how we define a problem will also pre-empt available solutions. An example. If we understand the problem of the male camp practice of objectifying women by rating their looks as largely to be explained by how women dress, then a possible 'solution' is for each individual female participant to dress differently so as not to 'attract' attention from men. Many people will probably consider this a non-solution and, in fact, a case of victim-blaming. So, if we redefine the problem as constituted largely by a festival culture that is believed to condone sexist remarks due to lack of (social) consequences, then it no longer appears as a viable solution to intervene at an individual level. Instead, a solution might be to intervene at a collective level as Roskilde Festival does by having volunteers facilitate a card game discuss 'lols, lust, love, and limits' with festival participants. Again, the wickedness of the problem means that this one intervention will likely not solve the problem. And a given solution may also produce new problems or reveal further complexities that need to be understood. Addressing wicked social and cultural problems therefore is continuous endeavour.