

# Defining Moments: Cultures, Power and Communities

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**Abstract :** Storytelling has been little used in tourism and there is little evidence to challenge the positive claims made for the benefits of festivals in our cultural lives. This study demonstrates that there are occasions where these benefits are not realized and the storytelling allows the processes to be captured through both formal and informal situations. This paper has been written to critically explore the roles of festival organizers in defining and delimiting the extent of a festival. It focuses on the ways in which communities can or cannot influence the development of a festival. The stories demonstrate how the organization of the festival with a limited and an elitist notion of culture, effectively excluded communities of identity and artistic practice from the remit of the community festival. The analysis demonstrates the ways in which the discursive practices curtailed and delimited the Festival.

**Key words:** Storytelling, Festival, Community

## Storytelling - a conjunctural moment

Storytelling, as a way of elaborating the dynamics of tourism, unpacking and explaining practices and processes has not received the attention it deserves. Good stories can capture critical elements, raise questions about the strengths and weaknesses of the literature, and promote engaged and critical reflection upon causal relationships and the outcomes and consequences involved in cultural phenomenon. Stories, as here, are even a way into discussions about why some things fail or turn out to be different from the original conception. The stories can provide an opportunity to consider who the people, institutions and agencies are that influence and shape development processes and to reflect on why some policies are effective and other policies so greatly resisted by various interests.

Our scientific training teaches us to look for linear models, of cause and effect, but our narratives would suggest that beginnings are always complex and even conflicting. Nor does the storytelling approach insist on the conventional structures of beginning, middle and end - the accounts of

the middle(s) are relational and the ends can be seen very differently depending upon the terms used to evaluate them and who is responsible for that evaluation. Excluded information hovers around the edges of case study, calling into question the account or viewpoint of the researcher (Considine, 2005).

At the time of the study, I was the Assistant Dean for Research and Development in the Derbyshire Business School, working extensively locally in the city and the county, not only in tourism research but developing projects in accountancy, supply management, marketing and logistics as well as my own work on cultural tourism and being a director of the independent film theatre and the photographic gallery. The University had a clear mission to be a driver in the modernisation of the city. The moment also included the work, intellect and energies of two PhD students who were both working on the field - Ágnes Raffay (2007) on stakeholder relationships in urban tourism and Allan Jepson (2009) on cultural festivals and communities. Both the researchers were granted open access across the city and I had the opportunity to attend the meetings of the city development team, the cinema and the arts forum as well as the Tourism Challenge team which I chaired in the City. The research was firmly embedded in the development of the Festival and yet entirely marginal!

These stories focus on the Jubilee Festival which took place from 22nd June - 1st August, 2002. The main reason for the celebration was HM Queen Elizabeth II's golden jubilee, but the Derby Festival was unique to the United Kingdom, as it brought together three major celebrations under the name of 'The Jubilee Festival': with the City celebrating twenty-five years as a city, fifty years of HM Queen Elizabeth II on the throne, and seventy-five years since the Church of England created the new Diocese and the church assumed 'Cathedral Status'.

The original proposal came from the Dean of the Cathedral who had the idea when he met representatives from twenty music and choral groups, who performed on a regular basis at the Cathedral. The Festival was designed to bring together a range of existing events from within the communities and add a few headline events that would attract greater interest. The existing events and the existing cultural organisers were brought together

under the stewardship of the representatives of the Cathedral, the City Council and the University, our three wise men, who appointed a festival coordinator, thus creating a team of four who were in direct control of the Festival's construction. They can be seen as the 'power brokers' (Ioannides, 1998; Klem & Martin-Quiros, 1999; Bastakis et al, 2004) and evidence of Judd and Simpson's (2003) 'independent centres of power' within public-private sector urban tourism developments which often bypass or limit democracy could be observed. Moreover Swain's (1995) patriarchal structures and male domination within the planning processes were also very evident.

According to the official aims of the organisers, the Jubilee Festival was supposed to enliven the local cultural scene and promote the culture of the city both within the city and further a field. The aims of the festival, taken from the post Festival report, were to (emphasis added):

• *Embrace all sections of the city's Diverse multi-cultural community*

- Provide an opportunity for people living and working in the city to celebrate and enjoy a wide range of events,
- Highlight the existing quality of the city's events calendar
- Stimulate new events and activities specific to the jubilee festival
- Focus attention on the main festival period
- Raise the city's profile regionally, and nationally
- *Celebrate the multiculturalism and diversity of the city*
- Integrate the principles of the city's marketing campaign
- Celebrate partnerships between local organizations

The focus here is on the role of the festival organisers and the compatibility of their view of culture with the views embedded in definitions and practices of community festivals. Lamont (1989) identified four prominent fields where power can be a prime cause for investigation; cultural industries as an arena for power struggles; knowledge and aesthetic competence serving as resources in the exercise of power; cultural power exerted indirectly by modes of definition; and finally power by exclusion - either of people or ideas. It is this last element that will be elaborated here.

The coming together of stakeholders from different backgrounds creates tensions as they are often required to operate outside their own established comfort zones and these experiences are 'managed' through the play of discursive strategies and, following Foucault, the contestation and negotiation are the essence of the development processes. This paper will explore these discourses and identify discourses that speak to both formal and informal elements of relationships. This approach offers a way of understanding the dynamics of development which goes beyond the static notions of stakeholder mapping.

## **Research Methodology**

This study adopts a social constructionist perspective as we believe it is important to gain an understanding of the views of the various stakeholders involved. There is a particular appeal and resonance in Law's (2004) call for a baroque understanding, which examines the details and complexities rather than looking for generalised explanations. Most of the approaches to policy making have taken a rationalist approach (Pforr, 2005) which often fail to explore or explain change but Bramwell and Meyer (2007) call for a holistic approach that captures both context and power. As Stevenson et al (2008: 734) observed thick descriptions can "include investigation into the irrational and less tangible aspects of policy making." It is important to recognise that there are multiple and subjective interpretations amongst the stakeholders (Dredge, 2009). To undertake the research, a grounded theory approach was adopted but not in the classic sense (Glaser and Strauss, 1968), as it cannot be possible for researchers to enter the field without some pre-constructed knowledges of the research arena. The study operates with an 'informed grounded theory' which acknowledges but seeks to test the pre-existing versions of the topic from our own experience, previous studies and the literature. The story tellers cannot and should not be left out of the story.

For the work reported here, we were fortunate to gain access to the decision making process, with attendance at the stakeholder meetings and easy access to the steering group. It was possible to follow the creation and the staging of the festival from the very early stages through to the events themselves. The data come from key informant interviews and participant

observations undertaken between 2000 and 2002. The key informant interviews were conducted with the tourism stakeholders of the city representing the public, private and voluntary sectors. In order to capture the dynamic nature of stakeholder relations in the city and the respondents own constructions of these processes, a snow-ball technique was used as the informants discussed further potential interviewees who they saw as key players in the developments. Clearly many of the respondents were known to the researchers prior to the research and their suggestions opened new doors and new relationships. Okumus et al (2007) have written about the ways of gaining access to organisations but in this context there was never a problem and little sense of gatekeeping. If the formal channels seemed blocked there were other informal, personalised ways to approach a respondent. In this setting the notion of cold calling was almost inconceivable.

The interviews were semi-structured and covered the important elements in the festival processes, through a series of connected open ended questions. All the interviews therefore covered the same ground but not necessarily in the same order. Interviews were conducted in a variety of locations from offices to coffee bars, from the Mayor's parlour to the kitchen and lasted between one hour and one hour and forty five minutes. All the interviews concluded with a question asking the respondent to reflect on any other areas that they thought would have been covered during the interview but which they felt had not emerged sufficiently.

The interviews were tape recorded and the responses were grouped into themes based on the use of key words and phrases by the informants. The data were then analysed in theme-specific matrixes which made the emerging patterns transparent and also allowed for the comparability of the responses from the stakeholders with different backgrounds.

The participant observation included the formal meetings and informal settings throughout 2000 - 2002. Studying these moments, what Healey (2005) terms 'episodes of governance' allows a deeper understanding of the patterns of relations within these processes of the Festival. Alongside the formal process moments of governance, observation also included the informal relationships in the city. Given the size of Derby and the tightness

of the communities, exchanges were encountered at social gatherings, outside supermarkets, at the cinema, sports events and festivals. These encounters can be described in Spradley's term (1979: 58) as "friendly conversations" and can be valuable counterpoints to the official meetings as individuals have different roles and relationships away from the meetings. Often it would be one of the 'observed' asking how the research was going. On other occasions there would be conversations not directly related to the festival but connected to the individual's own role(s) within tourism but within this context comments were often made that clearly related to the Festival.

Notes were taken of the observations and observations from others were also collected along with photographs. There were also many opportunities to feed these observations back to other participants to allow a 'reality' check, or in this case a multiple realities check.

Traditional approaches to research have been judged against conventional criteria of reliability and validity. Validity has been seen as the assumption of causality without researcher bias and reliability as the ability of the research measures to capture the data specified by the research, repeatedly, consistently and with the likelihood of generating similar results in similar conditions (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Decrop (2004) advances the criteria of trustworthiness, originally developed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to replace the older canons of positivist research. There are four dimensions to these criteria:

- Credibility - which equates to the issues of internal validity;
- Transferability - matched with external validity and more relevant to qualitative research than generalisability;
- Dependability - related to reliability. This recognises that knowledges generated are bound by time, context, culture and value (Decrop, 2004). This then focuses attention on the correspondence between the data recorded by the researcher and what actually occurred in the setting;
- Confirmability - associated with objectivity. Guba and Lincoln (1994) recognise that research cannot be totally objective but the system of analysis is made objective or neutral to construct a meaningful account of the

phenomena and the ways in which those meanings emerged.

Credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability all derive from:

- Careful use, interpretation, examination and assessment of appropriate literature;
- Careful justification of the qualitative research methodologies employed in a study;
- Careful structuring of data analysis to ensure full descriptive evaluation, and assessment to data of key significance.

The iterative analysis and triangulation of multiple sources demonstrates the validity of the research processes undertaken and of the account constructed here. The study of a complex, multilayered phenomena such as a community cultural festival requires a complex multilayered methodology to identify the stories that allow the exploration of power within and without the festival.

The early meetings indicated a clear understanding between the three key representatives of what Derby needed and the audience (it was difficult to think of them as participants at this point) were presented with a definition of a community festival that was shaped in high cultural terms, with a narrow recognition of the cultural forms to be allowed. The exclusive nature of the original festival events was also mirrored by the festival organisers' insistence that the cultural dimension of the festival should be educational and intellectually stimulating. The three organisers were all white, middle aged, middle class men who drew on their own values and experiences to produce the agenda that was both defining and delimiting (but then so was I and my agenda would have looked very different!). Their story was coherent and produced a moment of crystallisation that would not be challenged throughout the development of the Festival. The moment had produced a WISE 'White, Ideological, Stated and Educated' agenda. A multi-cultural audience from a multicultural city had heard, and by not rejecting, had accepted a mono-cultural statement of intent. The three wise men had secured the agenda for their Festival without any overt opposition and without the need to explicitly say 'no'.

## **Communities of identity, Residence, Gender, Ethnicity**

Derby does not offer a simple, single community. It is a city where there are communities organised and emerging around a range of values and identities. There is a high degree of civic pride and a very strong sense of identity, of belonging to a visible and vibrant city in the heart of the Derbyshire countryside. With this comes a distrust of incomers, those who choose to move to the city and who may well share the positive views of the long established families but do not share their histories. It is worth noting that two of the three organisers could be seen as incomers but that two of the three actually saw themselves as long established Derby citizens! However the dynamics of community construction should not overlook the importance of gender and ethnicity in creating alliances and oppositions within the city. No matter the claims to local identity, there can be no disputing the exclusive nature of the gender and ethnicity of our steering group. Moreover the cultural experiences and preferences of the three men were clearly derived from their associations with and identification through their own constructed cultural communities. This led not only to a focus on high culture but also to the selection of a limited range within that.

Opening the steering group up to the voices from and of different communities, with different values and priorities would have radically challenged this defining moment of the Festival. The stories told reflect the sense of hopelessness of getting heard in this context. It was not a fear of rejection that drove people away from the festival but rather the sense that no matter what they said they would not be heard. The disempowerment of phrases such as 'that is interesting' and 'we can look at that later' were translated as 'that is not interesting enough for us to include it' and 'later it will be too late to do anything but thank you for the suggestion'. These 'others' took their ideas with them and produced their events without the help of the Festival and worked through their community networks.

### **Theorising Power**

These discussions turn on the construction and use of power and it is in the power relations between stakeholders where the sense of cultural



definition will be tested. The legal authority and power to develop a plan and the (practical political) power to implement the plan are often distinct and held by separate groups. Power is always present, but often ignored. Cheong and Miller (2000) highlight how Foucault saw power as omnipresent emphasising the construction of positions of power through discursive practices, so "power is better conceived as a complex, shifting field of relations in which everyone is an element" (Fraser, 1989:29).

Foucault refers to the "power to construct authoritative definitions of social situations and legitimate interpretations of social needs" as cultural hegemony (Fraser: 1989: 107). This is achieved through a multiplicity of what Foucault calls 'micropractices', the social practices that govern everyday life, which in turn are gradually integrated into 'macrostrategies' of domination. It is also important to emphasise the dynamism of this view as discursive practices can produce new constellations at any or all times and social constructions should be viewed as "precarious ensembles" (Merquior, 1985:77).

Bramwell (2006:961) observed that "Power is depicted as emerging through the interlocking of actors' projects ... and this is influenced by the specific patterns of resource distribution and competition." Bramwell (2006) utilises the term discourse in conjunction with the notion of 'knowledge frameworks' derived from Long's (2001) reading of Foucault. A knowledge framework is a way of reading a relatively fixed and pre-constructed way of interpreting actions and discourses. For Bramwell (2006:961) they are "the ways in which actors come to grips with the world in the context of the struggles, negotiations and accommodations between themselves and others." The organisers had a particularly well established knowledge framework. As Fischer (2003) noted it is important to recognise the context, the deliberative practices, that underpin the operation of discursive politics. In policy debates, both knowledge frameworks and discourses influence what is included in the debates and also what is excluded, including the objects of concern, the preferred narratives for making sense of the issues, the actors that the policymakers consider, and the agendas for action (Stenson and Watt, 1999). Knowledge frameworks and discourses can delimit the "possible", tending to steer thought and action in a particular direction.

The theories of Weber, Lukes, Clegg, Foucault, and Gramsci were primarily used in this analysis. The evolution of the Derby Jubilee Festival saw the key players developing their power claims from a number of different sources within the traditional bases of authority, such as the church and the local authority. Weber's account of power is rooted in the investigation of the legitimacy of different kinds of authority (legal, traditional and charismatic). He argues that power is linked to authority, where the obedience towards the particular authority comes from two sources: a) any sort of motive to obey and b) belief in the legitimacy of the authority which can clearly be seen in the workings of the Festival.

As Clegg argues (1989:201) "Power is implicated in authority and constituted by rules: the interpretation of rules must be disciplined, must be regulated, if new powers are not to be produced and existing powers transformed." Nothing will ever be wholly stable; therefore resistance to discipline will not come from 'human nature' but "because of the power/rule constitution as a nexus of meaning and interpretation which, because of indexicality, is always open to be re-fixed." (ibid). This is the war of position which the Gang of Three undertook during the development of the festival without ever having to confront any opposition. This has become popularised in the concept of 'hegemony' Gramsci (1976), where power is seen to be exercised through consensus as well as through coercion. In effect the power relations are to be analysed by what is thought 'proper' and what is excluded. This has particularly serious repercussions for discussions of cultures, where the power to value and the power to deny can be very profound. Gramsci and Clegg both see the need for power to be analysed in terms of networks, alliances, points of resistance and instability which are also acknowledged by Foucault (1981).

Further evidence of the organiser's exclusive cultural stance is drawn from their desire for 'quality' events, which was justified by the festival organisers under the impression that high cultural or exclusive cultural events solely represented high quality. In holding these views of high or exclusive culture the organisers could be thought of as accepting traditional viewpoints on culture which view popular culture as cheapening high culture and as such did not value popular or inclusive culture as its equal.

## **The Power to Define Revisited - Patterns of Exclusion**

At the same time as the Festival, I toured with a paper (Clarke, 2000) exploring the ways in which the power to define was utilized and challenged within cultural tourism. This paper now allows an opportunity to reflect further on these processes by looking at the mechanisms of exclusion operating within the Jubilee Festival. The key examples come from the limited identification of and subsequent lack of inclusion of the local communities' voices during the planning processes. This had far reaching effects on the Festival's goals such as *'Embrace all sections of the community'* and *'Celebrate multiculturalism and diversity of the city'* rendering them almost impossible.

### **Exclusions by Cultural Definitions**

The festival's planning forums were largely undemocratic platforms through which organisers expressed their cultural stance. The selection of mainly exclusive annual cultural events, which had already been produced, and packaging them loosely under the umbrella of the Jubilee Festival made use of already existing products and closed the Festival to new or challenging definitions.

### **Exclusions by Cultural Forms**

The Derby Jubilee Festival also excluded a variety of cultural forms and venues. Within the festival programme for example there were no film, photography, drama, dance, theatre, or comedy based events. The city's public houses and clubs were also not utilised as festival venues and the parks within the city were only included once within the 'DET Motor show' which was a well established annual event. In retrospect there were a further six celebrations in the city that could have been included within the umbrella of the Jubilee if a broader definition of culture had been used: the twenty-fifth anniversary of the opening of the Assembly Rooms (1977); the twenty-fifth CAMRA (Campaign for Real Ale) Beer Festival; two hundred years since the death of Erasmus Darwin (1731 - 1802) grandfather of Charles Darwin; the twenty-first anniversary of 'Royal Crown Derby' pottery; the tenth anniversaries of both the Queen's Leisure centre (opened by the HM Queen Elizabeth II), and the Derby Heritage Centre. Although

notable these actually played little or no part in the formulation of the Festival as the focus remained on the 'big three' celebrations.

### **Exclusion of Cultural Groups**

Ethnic minority groups and diverse cultures within the city from India, Pakistan, the Ukraine, Poland, the Russian Federation, Serbia, Bosnia - Herzegovina, Japan, Persia, or the People's Republic of China, all of which exist within the city districts of Normanton, Peartree, Mickleover, Littleover, Sinfyn, Alvaston, were noticeably absent from the events and audiences which were created as a result of the Festival planning process. The Festival organisers missed a valuable opportunity to integrate and promote ethnic understanding across the city, because as a group they could not consider the importance of cultural and ethnic diversity within the festival context and also because they could not agree on how they could widen cultural understanding and participation in and through the cultural events.

### **Exclusion From the Construction of the Festival Concept**

In taking an exclusive view of culture the organisers also held the view that any inclusion of local community cultures would weaken the festival. In failing to identify, understand and embrace definitions of culture as a way of life, the Festival's organisers restricted the types of events which could become a part of the official Festival programme and therefore the cultural diversity within it. This can also be seen as a missed opportunity to soften traditional cultural boundaries and open cultural offers to a wider, culturally diverse local audience as well as introduce and integrate new ones into Derby's cultural sphere. It can be seen as an exercise of power by the 'Gang of Three' as they restricted knowledge about local community culture which gave them disciplinary power (Foucault, 1978) and they were therefore able to control the festival within their own definitions rather than moving in favour of the local communities.

### **Exclusion from the Planning Processes**

A further contributing factor to the hegemonic position of the Festival organisers was the result of their limited research and consultation. Notoriously this was seen in the invitations to engage the support and

involvement of the local communities in the Festival through consultation meetings being only extended in the English language. This action, which should be viewed as an exclusive gesture, had the effect that local communities in Derby who should have been the backbone of the Festival were not included within or represented during the Festival planning processes and so had no direct voice in what was supposedly their festival. This means that a community festival was being constructed without the local communities whose lack of inclusion and voices laid the foundations for the hegemony of the Gang of Three and their ability to exercise and retain power within the festival planning processes. The lack of involvement by the local communities also meant that their stories indicate that they were not able to feel any ownership of the Festival. This meant that the City Council and Derby Cathedral could claim ownership of what effectively should have been a community festival. This reveals the competitive nature which surrounds involvement in cultural production and whilst healthy competition can be considered an asset, in the case of the Jubilee Festival it caused separations and work in isolation because no one in the communities of practice were able to assume ownership of what should have been their 'community festival'.

## **An Alternative Version**

There was one occasion which demonstrated what the Festival could have meant to the city. The culmination of the celebrations was a visit by the Queen and around 30,000 people turned out to welcome her. Here the entertainments included Asian drummers, Ukrainian, Chinese and Derbyshire dance teams with the support of strolling musicians, jugglers and fire eaters. The interesting thing was that this day was not organised by the same Committee and was actually inclusive of local communities' cultures from within Derby and Derbyshire.

## **Conclusions**

The 'Gang of Three' were able to achieve hegemony in the Festival by firstly restricting the communities' knowledge and secondly by limiting opportunities for involvement even for those organisations who contributed financially and the local communities themselves. In doing this the three

were able to retain discipline and governance over the processes and the spatial dimensions of power within the political venue of the forums, which further served to limit the opportunity for any resistance to power.

The hegemonic control which was knowingly or unknowingly demonstrated had far reaching ramifications within the construction and delivery of the Derby Jubilee Festival. Firstly the local communities as a result of their non inclusion were not able to challenge the established order on decisions affecting the Festival, which meant that community opinions were not elaborated. Secondly this meant that local cultural identities and what might have been culturally appropriate for the Festival was defined out by the dominant group. Thirdly very little democracy existed within the Festival planning processes because the three male organisers were consistently in charge of making Festival planning decisions which meant stakeholders were unable to hold any influence or have any effect on the decision making processes.

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