

Investigating the Importance of Youth Culture in Successful Youth Events

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Abstract

Youth are an easily identifiable market, relatively homogenous, highly aural and visual, globally connected and increasingly technologically dependent, seeking to display image and belonging. This paper presents the findings of an empirical study investigating youth events using stakeholder theory, in particular the distinctive elements of youth culture that contribute to the staging of a successful youth event. A case approach was adopted for this study at an extreme/action sports festival staged in Western Australia. The methodology incorporated qualitative pre-event focus groups and in-depth interviews followed by a quantitative questionnaire survey administered using a random intercept method (N=182). The results highlight the importance of youth subculture in the staging of successful youth events. This includes the incorporation of a combination of sport, music/bands, interactivity and atmosphere. The results of the findings have implications for public and private event providers, event planners and policy makers who actively support and assist in the funding of youth events.

Introduction

'Youth culture diffuses not only in terms of style expressions but also as a particular space for social identity' (Kjeldgaard & Askegaard, 2006: 234), so whilst society has assigned a chronological space in modernity across the later teenage years and early twenties for the construction of the concept of youth, the staging of youth events creates physical or spatial contexts for the exhibition of youth social identity. This is seen with increasing frequency in both formal and informal gatherings of youth. Whilst many niche events are developed by special interest groups, youth events tend to be organised by stakeholders other than youth themselves. Thus, the aim of this study was to investigate from the youth perspective, that is to provide an emic account as to what constitutes a successful youth event. The significance of youth event research is encapsulated by Butcher and Thomas (2003: 31): 'Youth culture is highly aural and visual, connected to display and performance. It radiates an image of how and where a young person wants to be seen, or which group they belong to'.

Kjeldgaard and Askegaard (2006: 235) recognise that: 'The concept of youth culture is always constructed in relation to local socio-cultural conditions'. However, they also acknowledge the importance of the distinctive global profile of youth, such that:

... these local youth cultural projects are structured by the global ideology of youth encompassing identity, stylized consumption, and cultural innovation. The global youth segment therefore emerges as a transnational market ideology through the dialectical process of globalization.

The idea that the youth market is a global market, comprising similar needs for its constituent youth, supports the practice of staging youth events. Furthermore, it validates government organisations, community groups and private organisations in the development of youth events as part of their youth portfolio activities. It also supports the strategies of larger named events such as 'Big Day Out' (www.bigdayout.com), 'Live Aid/Live 8' concerts (www.live8live.com/behindlive8/index.shtml) and 'Gravity Games H2O' (www.gravitygamesh2o.com) which provide a range of experiences for youth both locally through their attendance and virtually through the global media broadcasting of these events. The significance of successful youth events is magnified due to the nature of youth culture being defined as comprising friends, music, sport, clothes/fashion/style trends, memorable experiences and the ubiquitous technology, communication and media habits (Lukose, 2005; Haytko, 2006; Kjeldgaard & Askegaard, 2006; Timmermann, 2007). These characteristics are unilaterally exhibited in youth populations and through a range of activities provide interesting scope for investigating these characteristics in the context of youth events. Whilst economic, social and environmental evaluations of events provide an indication of an event's goal achievement, the investigation of key stakeholders also provides an important indication of the success of an event by explaining the 'origins, operation and evolution of events, and [thus] provides direction to owners and managers on how to manage their internal and external stakeholder relationships' (Getz, 2007: 91). Due to the perceived homogeneity of the youth market and stakeholder salience, this group was recognised as a key stakeholder group for this research (Getz & Timur, 2005; Getz, 2007).

Freeman (1984: 36) broadly defines a stakeholder as 'any group or individual who can affect, or is affected by, the achievement of an organisation's objectives'. Getz (2005, 2007) discusses the nature of events and acknowledges the importance, influence and impact of stakeholders and events. A body of research examining events is developing from a range of stakeholder impacts and relations. Getz and Frisby (1988) discussed the implications of stakeholders influencing the change process in festival management, Larson and Wikstrom (2001) investigated stakeholder power games in Swedish festivals, Taylor and Shanka (2002) investigated wine festival visitors as stakeholders in the event experience, and Stokes (2004) developed a framework for event analysis after looking at inter-organisational relations of public sector event organisations in Australia. Therefore, it can be reasoned that event investigation using stakeholder theory is relevant and worthy of further research. Perhaps not traditionally a decision maker within the development of youth event strategies or youth events (for example the majority of youth events staged in Western Australia are organised by local governments) youth are integral in the success of

youth events as they have influence, are involved and hence can impact an event, thus are a key stakeholder.

Therefore, stakeholder theory was utilised to investigate a youth event by recognising the event visitor - in this case youth - as a key stakeholder group contributing to the success of an extreme/action sport youth event in Perth, Western Australia. A case approach was adopted and involved two stages of research. Focus groups and in-depth interviews with youth were conducted before the event to assist in the development of a suitable questionnaire (stage one) followed by the administration of a questionnaire through face-to-face interviews during the event (stage two). In order to achieve the overall aim of this study (i.e., the identification of attributes for youth event success) feedback was directly obtained from young people. Findings provide a basis for further research into the development of a youth event strategy as a useful tool for event planners, event sponsors and public policy makers.

This paper is comprised of four sections. Following this Introduction is a brief synopsis of the literature on stakeholder theory. The next section outlines the project method. Following this are the results and findings of the study and, finally, a discussion and conclusion is presented which includes limitations and implications for business and government.

Stakeholder Theory

The stakeholder concept was first used in 1963, and although appearing simplistic due to the ability for organisations to identify the groups and individuals who can affect, or are affected by, the achievement of their objectives (Freeman, 1984), it has become a popular framework for better understanding both the organisation and the contextual environment within which it operates (Pearson, 2005; Getz, 2007). Key stakeholder groups of organisations include: employees, customers, community groups, governmental regulators, environmental advocacy groups, suppliers and the media (Mitchell, Agle & Wood, 1997; Berman *et al.*, 1999; Gable & Shireman, 2004; Getz, 2005; Getz, Andersson & Larson, 2007). In the case of an event, such as a festival, customers are essentially the event visitor stakeholder group (Getz, 2007). However, the stakeholder concept is also deceptive in that the application of a stakeholder approach to strategic management requires an organisation to commit significant resources towards building and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships (Freeman, 1984). This point reflects the *snail darter* fallacy that the time consuming nature of adopting such an approach can deem it ineffective for an organisation (Freeman, 1984). Thus whilst acknowledging the benefits of involving stakeholders in event management, it must also be recognised that events are dependent on time and therefore the effectiveness of adopting such an approach needs to be investigated. Getz (2007: 92) recognises that 'to sustain itself in the long term, the organisation has to manage its stakeholder relationships effectively, and if successful it might become a permanent 'institution' in its community'. Getz continues the discussion by considering the moral aspect to stakeholder theory which argues that, regardless of the significance or power event stakeholder relationships may have, groups such as special interest groups or community groups interests should also be given due consideration.

A defining characteristic of stakeholder theory is that it involves strategic management and is not a strategic planning process (Hitt, Freeman & Harrison, 2001). As a concept, stakeholder theory is descriptive of data and the subsequent analysis of such data. The theory is also prescriptive in nature as it does not attempt to predict future situations but rather requires an organisation to purposefully select its foreseeable direction (Hitt *et al.*, 2001). Thus, a stakeholder approach to management provides an organisation with a single strategic framework that has enough flexibility to respond to changes in the surrounding environment. The application of stakeholder theory also requires management to identify and invest in relationships that will contribute to the achievement of organisational objectives (Hitt *et al.*, 2001). This is accomplished through the implementation of specific stakeholder engagement strategies based on the level of importance attributed to the identified stakeholder groups. Finally, stakeholder theory is an integrated approach to decision making that is designed to satisfy multiple stakeholder groups, as most organisations will generally deal with the requirements of a number of stakeholders (Hitt *et al.*, 2001).

The aim of the study was to encourage further discussion and future research into the application of stakeholder theory to events and, in particular, to investigate the attributes of a successful youth event. Based on the key research questions developed for the study, it is recognised that a successful youth event strategy requires the consideration of distinctive features, motivating factors and underlying benefits, as well as the issues that affect the attendance of young people.

Stakeholder Management Process

Freeman (1984) developed a four step process for stakeholder management. This process is applicable to the event sector (Larson & Wikstrom, 2001; Larson, 2002; Getz & Timur, 2005) and was utilised in the framework for this project. The first step of the process is to identify the key stakeholder group. This project investigated youth as being not only the event visitor (that is, the event consumer), but also the category of event which relates to the form of the program and type of activities offered at the event.

Step two involves an assessment of the stake and importance of each group to the situation. Young people were considered the imperative stakeholder group, therefore the final questionnaire needed to be relevant and youth friendly. This thought process was supported by research with the youth sector (Butcher & Thomas, 2003; Chatterton & Hollands, 2003), which concludes there is limited research concerning the wants and needs of youth (Gersch, 2000) and the prototypical nature of the global youth segment (Lukose, 2005; Haytko, 2006; Kjeldgaard & Askegaard, 2006; Timmermann, 2007).

The third step of the process requires an organisation to address how the needs and expectations of each identified stakeholder group are currently being achieved. In the view of Butcher and Thomas (2003), researchers have a tendency to view youth as powerless, uncritical consumers. This indicates that their opinions are somewhat undervalued. Therefore, this study sought to rectify this issue for event planners through stakeholder engagement and youth event research.

Finally, step four requires the organisation to make changes to their strategies. For example, youth feedback on the pilot questionnaire of this study was incorporated for the final draft. The results of the findings have implications for organisations in the business of staging events for youth, event planners and policy makers who actively support and assist in the funding of a range of youth events.

Stakeholder Research Approaches

The foundation of stakeholder theory is a typology of three approaches: the instrumental approach, the descriptive approach and the normative approach (Werhane & Freeman, 1997). An instrumental approach is based on the assumption that 'other things being equal, corporations practicing stakeholder management will be relatively more successful' (Getz & Timur, 2005: 233). The second approach is descriptive, which involves the explanation of how an organisation and its stakeholders actually network with one another. Thirdly, the normative approach is based on the notion that all stakeholder groups should be treated with respect by the central organisation (Werhane & Freeman, 1997).

It is important to acknowledge some of the ongoing debate regarding the three approaches of stakeholder theory. Communication theorists consider the approaches ineffective as they tend to offer an internal perspective of an organisation and disregard the need for effective two-way communication (Friedman & Miles, 2004). Furthermore, Kaler (2003) has argued that the instrumental and descriptive approaches are second order theories whereas the normative approach is applicable to all stakeholder theories in the deliberation of business ethics.

Stakeholder relations are increasingly reflecting the recognition of organisations for reciprocal dialogue and engagement (Andriof *et al.*, 2003). Debate amongst researchers has therefore shifted from stakeholder management theories to the practice of stakeholder engagement and relationship building (Andriof *et al.*, 2003). In consideration of such debate, the study involved the application of an instrumental approach to stakeholder theory based on the premise of stakeholder engagement and not solely stakeholder management. It is noted that this approach was applied with the acknowledgement of two-way effective communication between an organisation and its stakeholders. This was achieved through the facilitation and collection of data and feedback from the key stakeholder group for the event: the event visitors. As the event was to be staged on a repeat basis, it was envisaged that direct communication with the young people (event visitors) would encourage attendance to an even 'bigger and better' event in the following year. In addition, research was undertaken with a pragmatic perspective to reflect the separation thesis, which is a theoretical issue of stakeholder theory based on the premise that business is not separate from ethics and politics (Hitt *et al.*, 2001).

Stakeholder Theory and Events

Event research generally involves four themes: the evaluation of guest (event visitor) satisfaction; the return on investment for sponsors; economic impact assessments; and the perception of social and environmental impacts on host communities (Turco & Lee,

1996). Stakeholder theory and its application to the event sector is a relatively under-researched area. This is despite the fact that a stakeholder approach to strategic management can be utilised to assess guest satisfaction, evaluate sponsorship deals and determine the hosts' perception of positive and negative impacts. The application of stakeholder theory to event management can be investigated during two distinct stages. Key stakeholders can directly affect the achievement of an event organisation's objectives during stage one, the planning phase. Stage two occurs when the event actually transpires and, given the experiential nature of events, the event visitor joins the stakeholder groups that contribute to overall success (Taylor & Shortland-Webb, 2001).

Two benchmark research projects that involved the investigation of stakeholder theory and events in Western Australia provided a basis for this study of youth events. The first case study, conducted by Taylor and Shortland-Webb in 2001, investigated the *Spring in the Valley* festival; an annual event that is staged in Perth's wine growing region. Freeman's (1984) four stage stakeholder management process was applied to the research in order to determine the characteristics of the event visitor as a key stakeholder group. A questionnaire was developed in conjunction with the event organisers to obtain information from the event visitors in relation to demographics, frequency of visits, motivations and the types of activities at the festival. The content of the questionnaire was designed to draw conclusions regarding the contribution of event visitors towards overall success. The findings of this study indicated that the key attributes contributing to the success of the event were the atmosphere, the wine and food, the event visitors and the location of the event (Taylor & Shortland-Webb, 2001). Secondly, stakeholder analysis was conducted by Getz, O'Neill and Carlsen in 2001 at the annual world class surfing event held in the South West of Western Australia at Margaret River. The research methods included visitor surveys and observational studies, which were used to evaluate service quality. Such information can provide the event organisers with recommendations for improving event management (Getz *et al.*, 2001). Both of these case studies provided background information regarding the engagement of stakeholders for event research.

Youth Events

A review of the literature (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2003; Department of Family and Community Services, 2005; Lukose, 2005; Kjeldgaard & Askegaard, 2006; Timmermann, 2007) indicated that whilst there is a general understanding of the concept, there is no strict consensus as to the definition of the terms *young people* or *youth*. This study therefore classified the youth market as all people between the ages of 15 and 24 years inclusive; the market segment also targeted by the event organisers.

In Australia, the youth market is seemingly inaudible, especially when it comes to the consideration of their wants and needs in relation to policy development (Butcher & Thomas, 2003). One possible explanation for this attitude is the duty of care and risk management issues associated with people under the age of 18 years and the subsequent ethical considerations for researchers. Common themes that emerge in community development youth research include a lack of suitable facilities, limited meaningful youth participation opportunities, and the seemingly inferior social status of young people within their communities (Butcher & Thomas, 2003). These issues not only support the identified

research gap, but also highlight a valuable opportunity for events to provide for, and benefit from, youth culture. It can therefore be concluded that a greater understanding of youth motivations and behaviours would contribute to the delivery of a successful youth event, facilitate a more proactive corporate strategy and provide direction for public policy and support of youth events.

Research questions were developed based on a critical review of the relevant literature regarding stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984; Andriof *et al.*, 2003, Kaler, 2003; Freeman, Wicks & Parmar, 2004; Friedman & Miles, 2004; Gable & Shireman, 2004), events (Getz, 2007), the youth sector (Gersch, 2000; Butcher & Thomas, 2003) and benchmark research (Getz, O'Neill & Carlsen, 2001; Taylor & Shortland-Webb, 2001). The research questions are:

1. What are the important motivating factors, and underlying benefits, for young people to attend a youth event?
2. What are the distinctive features of a successful youth event?

The first question, which relates to the overall aim of the study to obtain a youth perspective to assist in the planning stage of successful youth events, is the focus of this paper. Research question two was developed to assess the characteristics of youth visitors as a youth event stakeholder group.

Background to the Case Study Event

The case event investigated in this research study was an extreme/action sporting event held in Western Australia. The main attendees at this youth-focused event were young people, although this was not a limiting factor of attendance as other groups such as families could also attend. Research was conducted over the three busiest days of this four-day event.

It is recognised that the areas of sport and events are closely related in terms of practice. However, there has been limited research into the dynamics of this relationship (Hinch & Higham, 2004). The growth of extreme/action sports for both viewing and participation has provided policy makers and event organisers with opportunities to access the lucrative Generation X and Y markets (Mull *et al.*, 1997). Such sports are often associated with adventure travellers and the backpacker youth market. Interest in these events has been facilitated by media and Internet broadcasting, resulting in increased interest both in physical attendance and virtual involvement from the technologically-communicated youth audience. A unique feature of the case event was the collaboration between the public and private sector with regards to securing the event, its administration and promotion. The event was marketed as a community festival, which involved action sports as well as bands, activities, stalls and exhibitions.

Research Methods

Stage one of this study involved focus groups with young people from local youth advisory councils to evaluate the pilot questionnaire that was developed in conjunction with the event organisers and sponsors. Feedback was analysed by thematically coding

responses and, wherever possible, the suggestions of the young people were incorporated into the final draft of the questionnaire. The final questionnaire that was administered at the event during stage two of the research contained closed and open-ended questions. This is an appropriate questionnaire design to use when investigating the actions, thoughts and feelings of the participants or event visitors (Collis & Hussey, 2003).

The questionnaire was administered via face-to-face interviews, which facilitated personal interaction between the researcher, research assistants and the event visitors. This method was beneficial to engage young people due to the fact that face-to-face interviews also allowed for the immediate clarification of any uncertainties relating to the questions. However, the process was extremely time-consuming and this affected the sample size of the study. Convenience sampling was the non-probability technique utilised for the selection of young people to participate in the survey (Cavana, Delahaye & Sekaran, 2000). Event visitors who were conveniently accessible to the researcher and research assistants were approached at the event site.

Open-ended questions were thematically coded using a tally system to record the occurrence of each response, as the majority of respondents provided more than one answer/suggestion. Statistical data analysis of the closed questions was conducted through the computer software package SPSS (Version 12.0). The majority of findings for the study were determined through the use of *exploratory data analysis* (Collis & Hussey, 2003) mainly due to the exploratory nature of the topic of youth events, with some variables analysed by the test for a single proportion.

Summary of Findings

Profile of Respondents

Table 1 shows that of the 181 valid responses regarding age, 83 percent of event visitors (n=151) were within the target youth age range of 15-24 years, with 42 percent being male (n=74) and 58 percent female (n=103). Verbal feedback from the research assistants administering the questionnaire indicated that female visitors were usually more approachable and agreeable to take time out from the event to complete a questionnaire.

To investigate where event visitors came from, respondents were required to provide either their Australian postcode or country of origin if overseas visitors. The postcodes were analysed to reveal that 88.5 percent of event visitors were from the Perth metropolitan area, with no dominant postcode. Eight of the event visitors came from regional areas of Western Australia. There were also eight interstate visitors surveyed, four from Queensland, three from Victoria and one from New South Wales. Ten of the respondents were from overseas. The specified countries included New Zealand, England, Ireland, Italy, Norway, Slovakia, Brazil and Japan.

Table 2 shows the frequency of responses for the identified categories of work, school, tertiary study and other. The majority of the respondents were employed (45.5%), with nine respondents indicating that they are involved with more than one of the options listed. This background information is of interest as it provides an insight into two areas

for future research to explore in further detail, these being the amount of available disposable income and leisure time for the youth event visitors.

Table 1: Distribution of Age of Survey Respondents (15-24 years)

<i>Age (years)</i>	<i>Frequency (n)</i>
15	17
16	15
17	22
18	19
19	9
20	27
21	15
22	7
23	11
24	9
<i>Total</i>	<i>151</i>

Source: Original table.

Table 2: Occupation of Survey Respondents

<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Number of Responses (n)</i>
Work	81
Go to school	50
Tertiary	46
Other	11

Source: Original table.

Distinctive Features of a Successful Youth Event

Respondents were asked to determine the motivating factors for them to attend a youth event. Table 3 summarises the responses to this question, which was answered by all of the event visitors who were surveyed. Five dominant motivating factors emerged including watching sports, atmosphere, the opportunity to catch up with friends, bands (music) and free entry. The significance of this question is that these motivating factors could be interpreted as the attributes of a successful youth event. A Binomial Test was performed to investigate the significance of these motivating factors.

Table 4 shows the results of the SPSS Binomial Test for questions investigating visitors' motivations relating to sports and bands (music) as well as interactivity. The proportion of respondents who indicated a positive response to sport is represented by Group 2 and was a very high 0.96. For music, the positive majority (Group 2) was 0.88. The result of the Binomial Test for both questions shows a 2-tailed asymptotic significance of 0.000. Therefore, the required 1-tailed significance would be $0.000/2$, which is 0.000.

This 1-tailed value is less than 0.05. There is sufficient evidence to indicate that the proportion of positive responses to both attributes of sport and music was greater than 0.50. Therefore, most of the event visitors were in favour of the research hypotheses that sport, bands (music) and interactivity contribute to a successful youth event.

Table 3: Motivating Factors for Survey Respondents

<i>Motivating Factors</i>	<i>Number of Responses (n)*</i>
To watch sports	113
Atmosphere	99
To catch up with friends	97
To see bands	96
Free entry	88
Lots of people my age will be there	42
Giveaways/prizes	39
To participate in activities	23
To find out info	18
Other	14

Source: Original table.

Note: * multiple responses allowed.

Table 4: Attributes of a Successful Youth Event (Binomial Test)

	<i>Category</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Observed Prop.</i>	<i>Test Prop.</i>	<i>Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)</i>
<i>Sport</i>	Group 1	<= 3.4	8	.04	.50
	Group 2	> 3.4	170	.96	
	Total		178	1.00	
<i>Music</i>	Group 1	<= 3.4	21	.12	.50
	Group 2	> 3.4	158	.88	
	Total		179	1.00	

Source: Original table.

Notes: (a) Based on Z approximation.

The opinions of event visitors regarding what makes a youth event successful were sought from open-ended questions (Table 5). Atmosphere was the dominant attribute, followed by activities at the youth event, which respondents specified should be constant and generate excitement amongst the crowd. Bands (music) were the third commonly occurring theme, in particular regarding free concerts with local bands. Finally, free entry and having lots of other young people in attendance were considered important attributes of a successful youth event. This finding supports the findings shown in Table 3, which summarises the motivating factors for young people to attend a youth event as identified by the event visitors.

Table 5: Attributes of a Successful Youth Event

<i>Attribute</i>	<i>Number of Responses (n)*</i>
Atmosphere	35
Activities	34
Bands	32
Free entry	22
Lots of young people attend	22

Source: Original table.

Note: * multiple responses allowed.

In order to investigate any possible attributes that youth believe contribute to the success of a youth event, the event visitors were asked specifically about what they thought makes a successful youth event a success. Table 6 provides an indication of these nominated success attributes by providing the top four attributes cited by respondents with regards to this open-ended question about what makes a youth event different from other events (e.g. family fun days, food and wine festivals). Respondents consider a youth event different from other events because there are more young people in attendance. Furthermore, the activities are youth-focused and accommodate the interests of young people. It was the view of event visitors that attendees of youth events create a different and better atmosphere compared to other events. This highlights the importance of the youth visitor as being not only the consumer at events, but also part of creating the youth event product and experience. Finally, the homogeneity of youth events is reinforced by the fact that youth events are usually not attended by the parents or extended family of young people.

Table 6: Attributes in Comparison to Other Events

<i>Attribute</i>	<i>Number of Responses (n)</i>
More young people	40
Youth activities	40
Atmosphere	30
No parents and families	20

Source: Original table.

Youth Event Typology

Table 7 shows the responses recorded for a question regarding the event visitors' perception of the most popular types of youth events for young people in Western Australia. Concerts, sporting events and festivals are clearly the most popular types of youth events. The issues associated with this proposed typology are that the interpretation and response to the question was affected by the overlap for each type of youth event. Many of the youth events staged in Western Australia incorporate more than one of the event types listed in Table 7. To overcome this limitation, each typology would have to be clearly defined for respondents in future research. However this finding is still useful as it

provides the foundation for a youth event typology that may assist event organisers to conceptualise their event during the initial planning stages.

Table 7: Preferred Types of Youth Events

<i>Type of Youth Event</i>	<i>Number of Responses (n)*</i>
Concerts (music)	115
Sporting events	109
Festivals	73
Community events	12
Other	9
Workshops	8
Tourism events	8
Informative events	4

Source: Original table.

Note: * multiple responses allowed.

Discussion and Conclusion

'Engaging with stakeholders - whether directly or indirectly - is an essential form of market research, especially for global companies' (Gable & Shireman, 2004: 4). This is indeed more important when given the accepted notion of 'glocalization of youth culture', that is 'youth [local] culture ... is increasingly shaped by and constitutes global cultural flows' (Kjeldgaard & Askegaard, 2006: 233). This study of youth events investigated an extreme/action sport event in Western Australia to engage with the most important stakeholder group for success: the youth event visitors. The literature review of youth events identified a research gap with regards to the youth sector in general and youth events, highlighting the significance of research into understanding young people and obtaining a youthful perspective. As 'young people are constantly conformed and directly affected by decisions, events, and processes that are out of their control' (Gersch, 2000: 1), an instrumental approach to stakeholder theory was implemented to engage young people in the research study. Stakeholder engagement contributes to the comprehension of social movements, enables strategic business decisions that reduce long term costs and enables organisations to adapt more readily to change (Gable & Shireman, 2004).

According to the study, the attributes of a successful youth event encompasses the presence of sports and bands (music). The youth event visitors also conveyed the importance of interactivity and the atmosphere created by a large crowd of young people. A common theme that emerged was the need for constant activity to create a festival-type atmosphere that focused on youth culture. This is an important factor to consider for future research into youth events. A *youth event* is not defined by the presence of one sport, a certain band or a particular activity. Inevitably, success seems to rely on the presence of a number of sports, bands (music) and activities, which are collectively essential ingredients for creating a vibrant and youth friendly atmosphere. The desire of young people is to do more than merely attend an event. This stakeholder group wants to be identified by

participating in an event through aural and visual experiences, in a youth space provided so as to allow for the exhibition of their social identity which in turn contributes towards the success of the event, thus providing the additional essential component of youth culture which is the memorable experience.

'Companies are compelled to move rapidly to take advantage of new technologies, markets, and opportunities' (Gable & Shireman, 2004: 4). The adaptive capacity of an organisation is particularly important with regards to youth event visitors and the globally connected technological world they inhabit. Another element of youth culture is the tendency to follow trends and fads, which emphasises the need for event planners to be proactive in market research and subsequent marketing strategies for youth events. Young people, often being viewed as the innovators for society, are generally more accepting of change and will embrace innovation (Kjeldgaard & Askegaard, 2006). Therefore, it would be relevant for marketers, policy makers and event organisers to consider the stakeholder power of the youth sector when developing successful youth events. Limitations to stakeholder theory, when applying to research into events, are the assumption of an open system with flexibility, the willingness of senior management to surface difficult issues, the involvement of top level management, and analysis paralysis due to the complexity of identifying and tracking managerial issues (Freeman, 1984). In the context of events, time factors are often limiting.

This exploratory study provides event planners, policy makers and public providers with the knowledge that the distinctive features of a successful youth event are the presence of sports, bands/music, interactive activities and a vibrant youth friendly atmosphere. It is recommended that future research concentrate on confirming the distinctive attributes of a successful youth event, investigate aspects of atmosphere and analyse the motivating factors and issues that affect the attendance of young people at events. The application of stakeholder theory will assist event planners to develop a successful youth event strategy with the input and ideas of young people.

Thus whilst youth gatherings attract negative media attention and 'public policy makers and moral watchdogs condemn youth cultural practices as threats to social order or have problematised youth as a vulnerable population desperately in need of adult stewardship' (Kjeldgaard & Askegaard, 2006: 232), well-managed successful youth events can support the need for youth to actively participate in youth culture. Youth events can provide the scene for globalisation of youth culture via technology and media for the virtual youth experience. Additionally, youth events can provide the local community with tourism opportunities and enhanced economic benefits to the community to potentially re-invest into youth activities and infrastructure.

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