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Festival Experiencescape: The Coexistence of Tangibility and Intangibility

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The Coexistence of Tangibility and Intangibility

Introduction

As events' contributions to destination development have grown, the field of event studies has received considerable and increasing attention from tourism scholars (Getz and Page 2016). However, until recently, festivals were not examined as a distinct arena within event research (Wilson, Arshed, Shaw, and Pret 2017), leaving multiple research gaps. For example, most festival research is case-study based, privileges description over analysis, and fails to make further generalizations (Mair & Weber, 2019). The mainstream of festival research has also focused, perhaps disproportionately, on service quality. For example, Y.-K. Lee, Lee, Lee, and Babin (2008) adapted the theory of 'servicescape' (Bitner, 1992) from the field of management into the concept of 'festivalscape'. A festivalscape consists of seven constructs: quality of the program, service provided by staff/volunteers, auxiliary facilities, food, souvenirs, convenience/accessibility, and information service. These prominent elements have been confirmed as significantly framing the festival experiences of attendees (Mason and Paggiaro 2012, Wilson et al. 2017).

The festivalscape theory has been applied in many studies, and can help researchers investigate festival experiences systematically. However, as well as its service focus, its limitations include a privileging of tangible environmental cues over intangible factors when seeking to explain festivalgoers' behavior. As Laing (2018) pointed out, most festival research focuses on operational issues and rarely considers social dimensions. Similarly, Mair and Weber (2019) highlighted how festivals' unique historical and cultural dimensions are fundamental to attracting tourists, but that festival and festivalscape researchers' investigations of such dimensions have been rare. This represents a major research gap that may hinder researchers' and practitioners' understanding of festivalgoers' needs.

As the social and economic roles of experience become increasingly vital, new concepts, notably the experience economy, have been developed (Pine & Gilmore, 2011). To understand more about the mechanisms involved in the formation of meaningful experiences, scholars have recently expanded the theory of the servicescape into the 'experiencescape'. Jernsand, Kraff, and Mossberg (2015) argued that analysis of experience through the lens of the experiencescape facilitates holistic interpretation and understanding of its specific characteristics. However, while festivalgoers have a demonstrable yearning for once-in-a-lifetime experiences (Brown and Sharpley 2019), scholarly application of experiencescape to festival experience has not yet been evident. Therefore, the present paper's expansion of festivalscape theory and attention to the intangible factors that shape the festival experiencescape are expected to contribute to the progression of festival studies, while also helping festival planners enhance their marketing and management strategies aimed at attracting tourists who seek unique, epic experiences.

Additionally, a number of researchers have suggested that methodological issues within festival studies need be addressed. For example, Wilson et al. (2017) noted that the majority of existing festival research is quantitative and cross-sectional, and recommended that more longitudinal,

qualitative or mixed-methods studies be conducted to increase paradigmatic diversity in this field. Getz and Page (2016) expressed a similar view, and pointed out that various methodological approaches, such as participant observation, phenomenology, experiential sampling, ethnology, and autoethnography could be used to understand festival experiences at a deeper level. Accordingly, the main goal of the current research is to expand festivalscape theory and examine festival experience through an experiencescape lens. Longitudinal and qualitative, it employs participant observation, interviews, and collective memory work (CMW) to explore the essence and meaning of festival experiences, guided by the following research questions: What is festival experience and festival experiencescape? How do festivalgoers remember festival experiences and construe a festival experiencescape?

Literature Review

Research on “Scapes”, Festivalscape, and Experiencescape

Theoretical work in environmental psychology has often proposed that tangible environmental factors serve as stimuli to generate positive or negative emotions in individuals within them; and that this emotion, in turn, determines those individuals' approach or avoidance behaviors (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). Many “scape” studies based upon this assumption have sought to explain consumer behavior; Chen et al. (2019) review of the relevant tourism literature found ones dedicated to “destinationscapes, technoscapes, financescapes, mediascapes, and ideoscapes” (p. 1409). The same authors also found that tourism researchers have applied various “sensescapes”, including smellscapes and tastescapes. Perhaps the best-known such theory is Bitner's (1992) servicescape. It describes how a complex combination of environmental cues within a service environment, including its ambient air quality, temperature, and sound, spatial arrangements/functionality, and symbolic elements like signage and décor may influence the internal responses and behaviors of staff and customers alike.

Y.-K. Lee et al. (2008) coined the term festivalscape, drawing on the servicescape literature to arrive at a representative mix of festival-environment features, including but not limited to food, souvenirs, information, the festival program, facilities, staff, and convenience. As such, the festivalscape can serve as a measure of festival quality (T. H. Lee & Chang, 2017) and as a useful way of framing visitors' experiences (Wilson et al., 2017). However, the seven dimensions of the festivalscape do not all apply to every type of festival. Therefore, some researchers have adjusted these dimensions to fit different festival contexts. For example, for food and wine festivals, Mason and Paggiaro (2012) used fun, food, and comfort as their main festivalscape dimensions. This revealed that, in such cases, the influences of the festivalscape on tourists' behavioral intentions were indirect, and mediated by emotion and satisfaction; and that such festivals' core products, food and wine, played a more significant role in defining the festivalscape than either fun or comfort did.

Some researchers do not use the term festivalscape to describe the tangible and intangible factors within festival environments. Nevertheless, there is a broad consensus that festival spaces are made up of multiple elements that have divergent effects on visitor experience (H. Lee et al., 2019). However, the model of festivalscape remains focused chiefly on the festivals' physical environs, and especially festival venues themselves (T. H. Lee & Chang, 2017). Moreover, as Pearce and Zare (2017) noted, memorable experiences are formed not only through cognitive, affective, behavioral, and interpersonal dimensions, but also through sensory ones. Therefore, they argued,

all these dimensions should be carefully designed to achieve an “orchestra model of experience” (Pearce and Zare 2017). Nevertheless, the broad range of festivalgoers’ sensory experiences remains absent from the existing festivalscape literature. As such, the present author feels that festivalscape model should be further expanded to better capture festival contextual and experiential features.

As studies relating to experience have evolved over the past few decades, it has increasingly been recognized that service providers cannot directly provide visitors with a memorable tourism experience (Pine & Gilmore, 2011). However, it is possible to craft landscapes or other spaces in which tourists can create and consume such experiences themselves (Mossberg, 2007; Olsson, 2016). Therefore, it is important to understand the variety of components that influence the tourist experience. Applying the *experiencescape* concept to the investigation of festival experiences is thus likely to help researchers identify aspects of those experiences that previous festivalscape research has overlooked.

Scholars have developed various definitions of experiencescape through context-based research. Fossgard and Fredman (2019), for instance, defined the nature-based tourism (NBT) experiencescape as containing all tangible and intangible components in the natural, physical, social and cultural settings related to the tourism experience. Chen et al. (2019) defined experiencescape both as a combination of emotion-stimulating sensescapes with the physical environment, and as a process whereby every element within the space is cognitively pulled together into a meaningful whole. In sum, experiencescape is a realm where components and settings relating to the creation and consumption of experience are intermingled and interpreted by the individual visitor.

Methodology

Study Context: Fuji Rock Festival, Japan

This paper aims to address that absence by choosing as its study context the annual Fuji Rock Festival (FRF), originally held at the base of Japan’s Mount Fuji and since moved to the forests of Naeba, some 150 miles to the north. FRF is one of the largest outdoor music festivals in the world, drawing pre-pandemic audiences more than 100,000 strong for its indie, folk, and rock bands and solo artists (Manabe 2015). It has been described as a pilgrimage site for music festivalgoers because of the ultimate experience it offers (Kumar 2015). As well as enjoying top-quality live music within a forest environment, festivalgoers can participate in various activities including film screenings at the ‘Fuji Theater’, and art appreciation at the ‘Palace of Wonder’, whose randomly placed sculptures with flashing lights create a surreal atmosphere; and many visitors’ own costumes are highly amusing. Those visitors who tire both of the music and the numerous activities on offer can take a cable-car ride or walk into the scenic forest and soak themselves in crystal-clear brooks. Although the festival site is crowded, the FRF’s peaceful and relaxed atmosphere helps visitors escape from their daily stresses (UnmissableJAPAN.com 2017).

There is a widespread stereotype of rock-music festivals as having been created only for teenagers and rebels. However, the FRF is impressively child-friendly with free admission for children under 15 (Fuji Rock Festival 2019). There is a play park, a Kids’ Forest, and many free playground sites with equipment in the forest. Children can also enjoy comic storytelling, mini-concerts, and workshops in which they can make their own toys or paint (UnmissableJAPAN.com, 2017). FRF is also well-known for its food stalls offering a range of cuisines and beverages from different

countries, which sometimes attract more visitors than the music (FRF, 2019). In short, it is obvious that people who visit FRF do so not only for music, but also for the leisure, cultural, social, sensory, natural, and spiritual experience. The festival experiencescape of FRF can therefore be regarded as dynamic and multidimensional, and was thus deemed a suitable research context for this study.

Data Collection

Because tourist experience is a continuously changing process situated within individuals' minds (O'Dell, 2005), this study utilizes the multiphase data-collection technique, which helps researchers to understand how festivalgoers' experiences evolve, and thus to obtain a more holistic picture of how festival experiences flow (Chen, 2019). Specifically, data is collected within each of the five major phases of leisure travel: anticipation, travel-to, onsite, travel-back, and recollection (Clawson & Knetsch, 1966; Harmon & Dunlap, 2018). In the first four of these phases, participant observation and formal and informal interviews were used, whereas CMW was utilized in the recollection phase.

Participant observation: the current study follows the approach pioneered by Kawulich (2005), who developed an observation guide prior to commencing fieldwork. During the observation, the researcher participated in every activity that the participants did, while maintaining a relatively neutral role. This was expected to enable the collection of rich observational data and the generation of a more comprehensive understanding of group dynamics and interactions.

Formal and informal interviews were used to enable the researcher and study participants to engage in comprehensive discussions. For formal interviews, an interview guide was developed in accordance with the literature pertaining to experiencescape. Four semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant, i.e., three weeks prior to the festival, on the day of travel to the festival, during the festival, and on the day of traveling back. Interview data were collected between June and August, 2016. Ten participants were recruited through purposive and convenient sampling because of their high frequency of participating in music festivals and their plans to attend festivals.

Collective memory work commenced with the participants writing down three particular memories of the Fuji Rock music festival. They were told that these three stories, to be written pseudonymously in the third person, should be related to unforgettable experiences and moments that took place during the festival, and include even the most trivial details (Mooney, 2017). This arrangement enables participants to detach themselves from their memories and to describe recalled episodes from a 'bird's-eye view' (Thomsen and Hansen 2009). In phase two of CMW, 10 participants of two groups met online because of COVID-19 restrictions, and each read his/her story aloud. All the others then made comments on each story in turn, and also expressed thoughts and reflections inspired by listening to the stories as part of this process. The third and final phase of CMW involved participant input into the researcher's data analysis and theory formation. Group members tried to identify themes and meanings related to the festival experiencescape.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The analysis started with a careful reading and re-reading of the interview transcripts and observation notes. The researcher highlighted information that was relevant to the research purposes, and wrote comments in the left-hand margin. These initial notes were subsequently summarized into concise phrases, with the aim of apprehending the essence of the text. Then, the researcher assigned these phrases into groups based on higher-level abstract and theoretical terminology, which were documented as emerging themes in the right-hand margin. Next, all the emergent themes were listed on an Excel spreadsheet, and the researcher started to look for connections between them. At this stage, some of the themes were clustered into superordinate themes. Finally, a table of master themes was produced, to aid in the identification of clusters of themes that most effectively captured the participants' opinions and concerns related to their Fuji Rock experiences.

Results

The present study's findings suggest that the festival experiencescape is constantly evolving as the attentiveness of an individual visitor changes. This characteristic also influences how festivalgoers construct and remember their festival experiences, which fluctuate along with the intensity of the emotion that they feel in different travel phases (i.e., anticipation, travel-to, in situ, travel-back, and recollection). The festivalgoers are at the center of the experiencescape, as they actively interpret their surroundings and construct their own experiences. Thus, their interpretation of the experiencescape is influenced by their personal backgrounds and histories. In particular, the accumulation of memories of past festival involvement sets up various expectations for the festival. If the experiencescape on site matches their expectations, further memorable festival experiences are produced. Thus, festival experience is personal and subjectively perceived.

Moreover, the festival experience is multi-influential, and therefore, the festival experiencescape is not a unidimensional space. Rather, it is composed of three main components: 1) the physical settings, 2) the socio-cultural settings, and 3) the service and management sector. The theme of the festival guides its management team to arrange the tangible part of it (i.e., the physical settings) and to indirectly influence the intangible one (i.e., the socio-cultural settings). The tangible and intangible components may generate multiple sensory stimulations and activate festivalgoers' senses including taste, smell, sight, hearing, and touch. All of them enrich the festival experience, which is thus the output of the interaction of sensorial, affective, cognitive, behavioral, and social/relational experiences (Mason & Paggiaro, 2012). The harmonious coexistence of the tangible and intangible dimensions of the festival experiencescape ultimately lead to the most memorable festival experiences, and thus produce potential economic benefits for the host, and socio-psychological benefits for the guest. This study proposed a conceptual model as Figure 1.

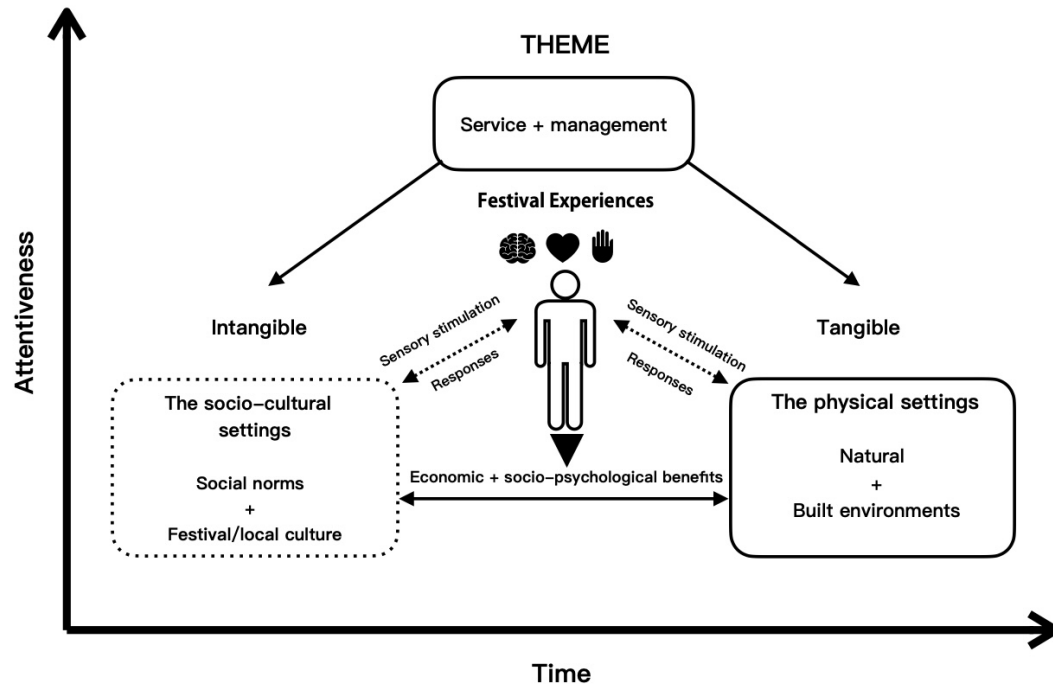


Figure 1. The festival experiencescape model

Conclusion and Discussion

The current study contributes to the main stream of tourism studies by applying a cutting-edge theory, experiencescape, to the context of a music festival. Through qualitative exploration and conceptualization of the process, this study has shed new light on the puzzle of how festival experiences are stimulated within festival experiencescape. Its findings reveal that the combination of and harmonious interactions between the tangible and intangible parts of a festival, namely, the service and management factor, nature, the built environment, and the human dimension, can create memorable festival experiences. A festival organizing team must lead the construction of a festival experiencescape by establishing a strong, clear theme and put festivalgoers at the center of the experience-design process. In this way, festivalgoers can actively interpret experiential environments and create their own experiences dynamically.

Most importantly, this study expands the festivalscape model, which focuses primarily on the tangible aspects of festival management, by giving due attention to the intangible ones. Moreover, many tourism studies have elided the difference between festivals and other types of special events, and thus drawn conclusions that cannot adequately explain festival experiences. The unique characteristics of festivals, including but not limited to liminality, festivity, and pilgrimage, are frequently ignored in such investigations (Getz, 2010), and this has resulted in various fallacies and misleading suggestions about festival management. The present study found that, except for the quality of the core product of a festival (in this case, the lineup of bands and the music) and thoughtful services, the participants were able to create memorable experiences because of the *placeness* and the *togetherness* attributes of Fuji Rock (H. Lee et al., 2019).

The reason that the theme of Fuji Rock, symbiosis of nature and music, was able to build a powerful mental image to the participants was that the entire festival was closely linked to the local environment and culture of Naeba, Japan, to which the festivalgoers had numerous opportunities to actively show their respect, thus truly becoming part of the festival. Moreover, through following the “zero waste” policy, they gradually developed a sense of community that could not be easily replaced by other hedonic benefits. In a nutshell, no festival organizer can craft a festival experiencescape without considering the uniqueness of festival culture and the regional identity of the host community. Future research should not neglect the influences of socio-cultural dimensions on festival experiences (Laing, 2018; Mair & Weber, 2019).

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