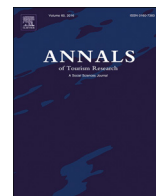


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Analyzing the effects of an urban food festival: A place theory approach

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ABSTRACT

Existing literature of festival tourism emphasises on heritage festival in rural place and seldom addresses the effect of urban festival as a potent force that contributes to place making. This study examines the missing conceptual link between urban festival and notions of place from a place theory approach. In-depth interviews with urban food-themed festival goers were conducted to understand their perceived meanings of the festival and place connotation. The results disclose three dimensions of meanings: festival as place, festival as locale and festival as imaginary identity. The study confirms that urban festival enriches a unique sense of place, whilst its intrinsic value to manipulate the competing ideologies of a place should not be slighted.

Introduction

Places are on-going social constructions rather than pre-given, fixed or neutral spaces. Place theories are widely applied by scholars for generating insights on dynamic phenomena in the contemporary society, such as mobility and migration (Barenholdt & Granas, 2008); globalization, region and locality (De Blij, 2008; Tuan, 2009); production and consumption (Overton & Murray, 2016). Tourism has been examined, as a socio-cultural phenomenon, through the lens of social sciences. Crouch (2012) investigates tourism using the notion of ‘flirting with space’, engaged with the inter-relations of place and tourism, and how creativity happens in those inter-relations. Place theory therefore may serve as an approach for contemporary socio-cultural enquiries, especially as space and place are increasingly connected by the postmodern dynamics of mobility, consumption and globalization (Cresswell, 2012).

The role of tourism is to present places that are comprised of local people, landscapes, experiences and commodities; and make them attractive for tourists to visit. Food festivals in urban places are perpetual productions of social relations which have been commonly viewed as a tool to enhance the tourism appeal of a place. The dining experience brings the tourists closer to the local community and creates points of identification and transformation of a local sense of place. For local residents, a sense of place is formed by and attached to their daily life. Meanwhile, tourists’ sense of place may be shaped when they participate in social activities such as a local celebration. Thus, the dining experience fosters tourists’ interaction with the community and can be viewed as a “cultural marker” (Okumus, Okumus, & McKercher, 2007) to internalise the perception of a place through embodied experience.

Food and dining practice are significant sources of identity formation (Everett, 2012; Lin, Pearson, & Cai, 2011). “We are where we eat” and the food and eating behaviour can be used as “a means of forgoing and supporting identities” (Richards, 2002, p. 5) of a place. Akin to several urban cities, food consumption experience has always been an integral part of city life which provides an

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opportunity to sample the local identity. Seeing the potential benefit of promoting featured foods tourism for place differentiation, government authorities promote their places by introducing food-themed festivals for marketing their destinations to tourists. However, this endeavour of promoting festivals to the community outsiders with the intent to generate tourism demand has raised a concern: the cultural heritage of a place's food preference and dining practice may go beyond preserving the past but rather, practically build the future of a place. During the organization of a festival, local community groups might mingle with one another, although they have continually competed in staking their claims on the meanings of festivals and their preferred identity of a place.

The role of tourism in place making is well researched (Chang, 2012; Hultman & Hall, 2012; Lew, 2017; Zhang, L'Espoir, & McKercher, 2015). Underpinning geographical conceptions of place-based concepts such as sense of place and place making have consciously and unconsciously contributed to the study of festival tourism (Derrett, 2003; Jaeger & Mykletun, 2013; McClinchey & Carmichael, 2010). However, studies on food-themed festivals are largely focused on ethnic local food (de Jong & Varley, 2018; Everett, 2012; Sims, 2009). Little attention has been paid to the effects of the "culturally transplanted event" (Xiao & Smith, 2004, p. 163) such as holding German Oktoberfest in Asia on the production of the meaning of a place. Ma and Lew (2012) further describe this type of contemporary modern festival as a placeless event emphasising on the construction of participants' experiential enjoyment and a sense of "liminality" (p. 16). Transplanting a global event into a place is not new in the relevant literature, particularly with food and wine as a subject theme (Sohn & Yuan, 2013; Brown & Chappel, 2008; Xiao & Smith, 2004). Yet, whether the global theme of festive celebration could match the native social and cultural identity of a place and eventually establish a unique sense of place remains under-studied. To date, festival tourism is mostly considered as a promotional tool to achieve the economic goals of a place (Crespi-Vallbona & Richards, 2007). Thereby, the pronounced orientation toward the effects of festival impact studies is attuned to the economic benefits, such as visitor number and expenditure, input-output analysis, net-economic benefits and visitors' satisfaction (Kim, Kim, & Goh, 2011; Wong, Wu, & Cheng, 2015). Implicit non-economic effects such as feelings toward a place and sense of place uniqueness are equally important in formulating theoretical contributions that assist in the interpretation of the festival-to-place relationship. Our study aims to conduct an in-depth investigation of the socio-cultural meanings of an urban food festival in Hong Kong and its induced place effect, in order to fill up the aforementioned research gaps.

Hong Kong has positioned itself as a culinary destination (Okumus et al., 2007) with emphasis on the exotic fusion of Eastern and Western flavours (Hornig & Tsai, 2010). In an attempt to link food identity from a multicultural perspective, Hong Kong Tourism Board has strategically introduced a Wine & Dine Festival to promote its hybridized cultural identity. In our study, we want to unearth how the multi-national and multicultural cosmopolitan – Hong Kong is produced and; what this tells us about the milieu of the socio-cultural communications in a contemporary urban community. Conceptually, our research focuses on two foci – festival tourism in urban places and place as a product of human experience. By examining relevant place theories, we highlight that representations and presentations of places come to affect the realities of contemporary urban communities. In so doing, we introduce the key issues for debate, namely, place is irrelevant in some contexts, while tourism is responsible for exacerbating differences that could be contrary to the wider socio-cultural discourses behind tourism development.

Conceptualizing the research

Festival tourism in urban places

Festivals are regarded as a "sacred or profane time of celebration" (Falassi, 1987, p. 2) which are connected to celebrations of the communities. Being a type of leisure activity, festivals have functioned as an essential component of the social infrastructure for local communities. However, the original functions of local celebrations are perceived as social gatherings "based on local consumption and organised around localised geographic ties" (Gotham, 2005, p. 242), could not reveal the contemporary role of festivals in urban places. Gotham (2005) regards festivals in urban places as strategic spectacles of social forms that capture tourist consumption. In addition, such urban spectacles consist of "hegemonic ideologies" and "dominant images" which allow the transformation of the urban place into an aesthetic product symbolizing consumption, leisure and entertainment for tourists. The meanings of festivals in urban places have become increasingly diverse and complex in city setting.

Selberg (2006) states that festivals are likely to "direct towards local identity and could communicate outwards that make the place interesting to outsiders" (p. 311). Therefore, the prime duty of festivals has shifted to the negotiation and redefinition of the identity of a place. Brown and Chappel (2008) point out that while food-themed festivals capture the attention of international tourists, the identity of a place may not be significantly relevant in the process of festival consumption. Due to their highly commercial forms with standardised activities and common presentation formats, food-themed festivals held in urban city settings have rapidly emerged (Johansson & Kociatkiewicz, 2011; Wong et al., 2015). Van Aalst and Melik (2012) evaluate the link between an urban festival and its host city by assessing whether the level of place dependency affects the meanings of festivals as perceived by the main actors (i.e., festival organisers, visitors and local government authorities). Their findings highlight that the concept of place seems to be less important to festival organisers and visitors than to local government authorities. The festival organisers and visitors perceived the festival as a "destination in itself" (p. 204) and not as attached to any place. In fact, this placeless-festival concept is not new. Previous studies by Prentice and Andersen (2003) notably highlight that a festival is a part of "the experience of gregariousness" that "may ultimately be independent of any specific place" (p. 12) during the festival consumption process. Likewise, MacLeod (2006) argues that urban festivals continually use ordinary themes of spectacle to appeal to tourists. This "repetitive formula" in the construction of festivals for tourist consumption is observed elsewhere in the world.

By contrast, local government authorities are convinced of the positive relationship between festivals and the city (Van Aalst & Melik, 2012) and appreciate the role of festival as an important showcase. Similarly, Johansson and Kociatkiewicz (2011) believe that

“festivals imbue the city with life” and could “enrich and transform the city in which it occurs” (p. 403). As long as the selective theme of festivals are deemed legitimate by the local government, a preferred identity of a place can be strategically planned and managed to stage the intended experience for tourists. Thus, festivals are “perceived as an easily marketable, aesthetic experience that is contained in time and space, [and] presents an attractive means for such production” (p. 402). Realizing the potential interrelationships among food, festival tourism and place, government authorities of various destinations consider this intangible resource as a competitive advantage in marketing their places. Government authorities in Hong Kong, Japan and Singapore, intend to present their local cuisines and food cultures through government websites to promote their places (Hornig & Tsai, 2010). However, existing studies regarding the effect of food festivals on the perception of a place and its people remain scarce, especially in an Asia city. Thus far, empirical research on food festivals has tended to centre on how to preserve and promote local cuisine and indigenous culture in ethnic restaurants (Chang, Kivela, & Mak, 2010; Cohen & Avieli, 2004; de Jong & Varley, 2018). Research on festival tourism has predominantly focused on visitors’ motivation, satisfaction and intent to revisit (Chang & Yuan, 2011; Kim et al., 2011; Wong et al., 2015). This market-driven place-identification process in the context of festival promotion further highlights the research debate on place-based connotations in the context of festival tourism in urban city setting.

Place as a product of human experience

The idea of place first emerged through the humanistic school of thought in geography that was influenced by Heidegger’s interest in the spiritual link between human experience and the material world. Gieryn (2000) outlines three components of place: geographic location, material form, investment with meaning. Location refers to a certain spot in the universe, thus relatively restricts interior conditions while it is closely connected to boarder spatial context. Physical landscape contributes also to the production of a sense of place. Landscape perception is determined by the experience of the tangible elements of place such as built environment and scenery. For Hong Kong, both of the daytime and nighttime cityscape near the Victoria Harbour area has been well considered as a reflection of the unique sense of place (Huang & Wang, 2018). Locale refers to the sum of material, both natural and cultural, at a particular location. It is the sphere of action and interaction, which includes economic operations, societal conditions, cultural traditions in both informal and formal setting. Sense of place describes a complicated set of feelings which are evoked by a particular place. There are comparatively durable senses of place which are the product of shared experiences. When various senses of place are both public and shared, there often is contest over what the appropriate meanings of a place may be (Cresswell, 2004).

Humanistic geographers emphasize human-world relationships through the realm of experience, and argue for the subjective experiences in a world of places (Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1977; Buttimer & Seamon, 1980). Pred (1984) claims that place, whether referring to a metropolis or an agricultural area, always represents a human product. Place, as such, is not merely what can be fleetingly observed on the landscape, a setting, or locate for human actions. Rather it is “what takes place ceaselessly, what contributes to history in a specific context through the creation and utilization of a physical setting” (p. 279). Places in the present are historical, nonetheless they only demonstrate a partial history. In a world of social hierarchies, place making, other than an outcome of social practices, is seen as a tool in creating, maintaining, and transforming relations of domination, exploitation, and oppression. Lew (2017) thus considers place making an innate human behavior. It ranges from the organic and unplanned actions of individuals – defined as “place-making”; and to planned and intentional global theming by governments – defined as “placemaking”.

Placemaking may carry negative connotations by the notion of placelessness. Augé (1995) argues that places have increasingly been replaced by non-places, which cannot be defined as relational, historical or concerned with identity. Non-places are temporary spaces for consumption, communication and circulation, for example shopping malls where our roles are that of customers. For Augé (1995), non-place is not in opposition to place, but is tangled up with it. In the concrete reality of today’s world, “places and spaces, places and non-places intertwine and tangle together” (p.107). Place and non-place are thus contingent, relational and continually folded into one another. Relph (2016) suggests that conventional ideas about location, context and sense of place no longer apply as places and the way they are experienced have been fundamentally impacted by ongoing technological changes. Broad experiences brought by the growing mobility of people inevitably import ideas and practices from elsewhere, and then are integrated with whatever is locally distinctive, for example, tourism development.

The aforementioned place and placelessness salutes the contemporary conception of place as product of human experience. Place is thus considered as social construction processes that are conditional not only to the level of penetration of globalization, but also to the way in which these processes are mediated through local processes of place making. By this token, Bosman and Dredge (2011) propose that the best tourism places should exhibit both place-making and placemaking (Lew, 2017). However, defining the features that lead to the distinctiveness of a place and distinguishing the identity of a place are challenging. Corsane, Davis and Mutas (2009) believe that “local distinctiveness is not just beautiful places; it is about details... and the things which create identity” (p. 50). Beyond the tangible aspects of a place, meanings could also be shaped by intangible specifics, such as festival experience. Savouring various local and international cuisines or wine in a food-themed festival is in fact, a tourist’s opportunity to encourage a dialogue with local people and experience the culture in a place. The production of food festival creates not just a location, but a public space for people to come together to experience “physical co-presence” (Richards & Palmer, 2010, p. 23) and thereby establish a sense of place.

Research on sense of place is one of the important components of place theory within the broad discipline of the social sciences and predominantly focuses on the experiences, such as personal encounters in a place (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2006; Relph, 1976, 2001). A sense of place is “the ability to recognise different places and different identities of a place” (Relph, 1976, p. 63). However, location itself is an insufficient condition to create a sense of place. Rather, human experiences give meaning to a place. Sense of place comprises not only one’s perception but also one’s feeling about a place (Castree, 2009). Tourism researchers have adopted the sense

of place discourse either as an umbrella or individual item, such as place identity and attachments, to examine local residents' attitudes toward the impacts of tourism (Kaján, 2014; Strzelecka, Boley, & Woosnam, 2017; Wang & Chen, 2015). Those studies have reinforced the intertwined role of people's emotional bonds with places, and more importantly, the unrevealed theoretical underpinning of the notion of place on tourism research. Consequently the traditional view of place as static and constrained by boundaries are challenged.

As a result of the global flow of people, information, commodities and capital, an argument on the progressive concept of place (Massey, 1994) has opened up a new agenda to connect the sense of place to a wider world. Larsen and Johnson (2011) point out that the intimate individual experiences in a place are not limited to the structured social action or historicity within that specific location; these experiences manifest “any form of communications necessarily invokes linguistic and theoretical abstractions of self, other, site and world” (p. 641). However, people can be tied up imaginative projections resulting from the influence of images, icons and symbols that are presented in the public media. Knox and Pinch (2010) argue that “the formation of identities involves the use of a great deal of imagination” (p.47). For tourist, festival tourism can be viewed as one of the practical social occasions that allow the expression and awareness of the situatedness that engenders the possible social and ecological relationships with other places and people. Chronis (2012) concurs also tourism imaginaries reinforce the ‘competing ideologies’ of a community. Subjected to the preferences of government authorities or opinion leaders intend to project, the idea of a place could be designed and packaged, using a top-down approach. Thus, the argument of placeless festivals (MacLeod, 2006), particularly the global modern festivals (Ma & Lew, 2012) that are widely adopted as a tool for place promotion, might be worthy of in-depth investigation with regard to their effects as human (tourist) experiences in the process of making and re-making a place.

The central question for our investigation can therefore be framed as follows: how is the place or festival tourism created? or in other words how the place is produced? Utilizing Henri Lefebvre's (1991) idea that spaces can be understood in terms of their imaginative, material, and practiced constructions, we begin to reflect on the impulses that have made the place of festival tourism. We are interested in the ways in which the local place reflects its own history, or is subverted by wider social and discursive forces, and the ways in which festival goers (i.e., tourists) took-on imaginings and representations that the local place is the subject of, to incorporate tourism into their perceived meanings of place.

Research methods

Case selection

Hong Kong offers an alternative perspective on the critical relationships between festival tourism and notions of place. The city is renowned for its distinctive local way of life with a heterogeneous cultural system and separate sense of national identity, compared with other cities in China. It is a Special Administrative Region (SAR) of China under the ‘one country, two systems’ principle. Different from other Chinese cities, Hong Kong has a separate legal and administrative system and economic independence. Before its handover to the People's Republic of China in 1997, Hong Kong residents had “[declared] their distinctive and compelling set of shared values, norms and ideologies in conjunction with the sense of an open society in Hong Kong” (Fung, 2001, p. 595) through a special label of ‘Hongkongese’. Although the majority of the Hong Kong population is ethnic Chinese, most residents see themselves in the position of “sampling the best from both cultural traditions” (Bond & Hewstone, 1988, p. 156) because of the combination of the foundation of Chinese spiritual grounding (e.g., diligence, intelligence and practicality) and Western technical know-how.

After the handover, the city intends to become a first-world city in China compared with other major international cities. These newly negotiated identities are “underway to establish links to cities within the Chinese nation as well as to other global cities” (Ma & Fung, 2007, p. 183). In 1999, Hong Kong government first proclaimed the city to be “Asia's World City” and started to cite more frequently world cities such as New York and London as references to its identity. In 2008, a story about the association of the three connected cities in the world was featured in *Time* magazine (Asian edition) in January. The term ‘Nylonkong’ was coined, thereby recognizing that Hong Kong has been formally placed alongside New York and London (Chu, 2010). Up till now, the catchy tagline “Asia's world city” is still officially used by the HK government for city branding, displayed mostly in major events of the city (Brand Hong Kong, 2018). This recognition increased the diversity and complexity of the place identity of Hong Kong. The post-colonial Hong Kong has intentionally positioned itself as having a distinctive ‘local Chineseness’ with a ‘Western flavour’ which is different from the character of other cities in China (Zhang et al., 2015). By creating and reinforcing the national myths of Hong Kong through the tourism agency, the unique local identity of Hong Kong is firmly embraced.

Recognizing the potential synergy between festival and tourism, the Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB) has introduced a Hong Kong Wine and Dine Festival (HKWDF) in 2009. The festival theme in its inaugural year was ‘Best Place, Best Taste’ (see Fig. 1), which deliberately promoted to tourists its cosmopolitan city of life. Although Hong Kong may not associate with its uniqueness by promoting local wineries, the festival has been well incorporated into the HKTB event calendar to promote the ‘East meets West’ place representation of Hong Kong. The festival was classified as a type of ‘Progressive Chinese-plus’ myth making tool (Zhang et al., 2015), emphasising on the existence of a unique hybrid cultural features which are different from other Chinese cities. In that sense, the HKWDF casts a mirror on the past of Hong Kong as well as the future – a suitable exemplary case to reflect how the narratives of festival tourism could present, shape, and reshape a place.

Since the 2009 inaugural year, the HKWDF has been recognized by ForbesTraveler.com as one of the top 10 international food and wine festivals. The total number of visitors of this festival has doubled from 70,000 in 2009 to 140,000 in 2013 (HKTB, 2013). In view of the rapid growing number of visitors, the festival was relocated to the New Central Harbourfront, right in the heart of Hong Kong's commercial centre in 2013 (HKTB, 2013). For the first time, an entrance fee of HK\$30 (equivalent to US\$4) was introduced,



Fig. 1. Promotional material presented by the Hong Kong Tourism Board.

while the cost of food and wine tasting were purchased separately.

Sampling and data collection

Face-to-face interviews with individual tourist were conducted on-site during the festival period. We use purposive sampling. Only tourists who were first time festival goers and read about the promotional materials (either online or offline) before joining the festival were selected for interview. Obviously, the festival is a planned tourist event initiated by the government authority. However, tourists perception on place do not merely based on what tourism authority intended to showcase (Kim, 2010) but made by their cognitive and affective interpretations on people and place through the local activity participation. In tourism contexts, little is known about tourists' experience of urban festival and its induced effects on the perceived connotation of place. Therefore, we decided to apply grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) so as to ground our study on the tourists' perception of the festival experience among diverse views. Our study aims to discover the theory implicit in data by exploring this social phenomenon that has received limited attention. A qualitative approach was employed to collect data through semi-structured in-depth interviews, allowing more flexible, deep and wide-angle multidisciplinary analysis that a quantitative approach may not provide (Deery, Jago, & Fredline, 2012).

Unlike other qualitative research, our study adopted 'theoretical sampling' following the general practice of the grounded theory method to search for potential participants. A true 'theoretical sampling' does not suggest recruiting their participants with particular predefined participants' profile and numbers. Instead, theoretical sampling is used "to search for people and cases to further elaborate theoretical categories" (Matteucci & Gnoth, 2017, p. 51). The ongoing development of 'theoretical categories' through constant comparison between data and analysis is not simply routine application of formulaic technique to data interpretation. The researchers have to use 'theoretical sensitivity' to describe and interpret the data in an open and creative way. The sample size in our study was determined by the optimum number necessary to achieve the data saturation level, which means the data saturated the construction of the theoretical model and achieved 'theoretical saturation' (Richards & Munsters, 2010), indicating that no new theme can emerge by inputting additional data sample.

In total, 26 in-depth interviews with 10 females and 16 males, were conducted on-site during the festival period. However, the data analysis indicated that dimensions and themes became stable at the 18th interviewees. The last 8 interviewees did not generate any significant new categories in the codebook. As a result, the authors stopped to recruit new interviewees when data saturation was reached (Jennings, 2005). Our sample size fulfils the criteria of the notion of 'theoretical saturation' that "a sample of twelve will likely be sufficient" (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006, p. 76) under the non-probabilistic sample sizes for in-depth interviews. The socio-demographic profile of interviewees is listed in Table 1.

Data analysis

The interview questions had two main approaches: (1) tourists' perception of the food and eating practices that they consumed/ explored during the festival and (2) share their feelings toward the place, people and culture of Hong Kong with respect to their festival experiences. Each interview lasted 15–20 min and was digitally recorded with consent from the participants. Interviews were conducted either in English or Chinese. The transcripts were technically stored in the NVivo 10 for data coding and thematic analysis. Immediately after data collection, the handling of protocol design and codebook development for the textual data was developed for the analysis. Emergent data codes/nodes were captured and thereby to be collated within 6 main themes, namely location/place distinctiveness, social acceptance, cultural desires, emotional enchantment, imaginary identity and open scale of place; and finally developed into 3 main dimensions – 1) urban festival as place; 2) urban festival as locale and 3) urban festival as imaginary identity – to explain the intertwined festival-to-place relationship framework. Fig. 2 shows the process of data analysis.

Table 1
Socio-demographic Descriptions of Interviewees.

No.	Country of Residence	Gender	Profession
1	UK	Female	Financial Analyst
2	USA	Female	Student
3	Australia	Male	Human Resource Manager
4	United Arab Emirates	Female	Police Officer
5	Japan	Female	Home duties
6	France	Male	Owner of a private company
7	South Africa	Male	Architect
8	Australia	Male	Writer
9	Sweden	Male	Purchasing Officer
10	UK	Male	Teacher
11	China	Female	Hunting for jobs
12	China	Male	Officer
13	Taiwan	Male	Financial planner
14	Taiwan	Male	Teacher
15	Australia	Male	Owner of a bottle shop
16	USA	Female	Designer
17	UK	Female	Logistics Officer in a global warehouse
18	Singapore	Male	Banker
19	Canada	Female	Student
20	Taiwan	Male	Owner of a restaurant
21	Malaysia	Male	Government Officer
22	China	Male	Banker
23	South Korea	Male	Merchandiser
24	Canada	Female	Researcher
25	China	Female	Home duties
26	Japan	Male	Sales

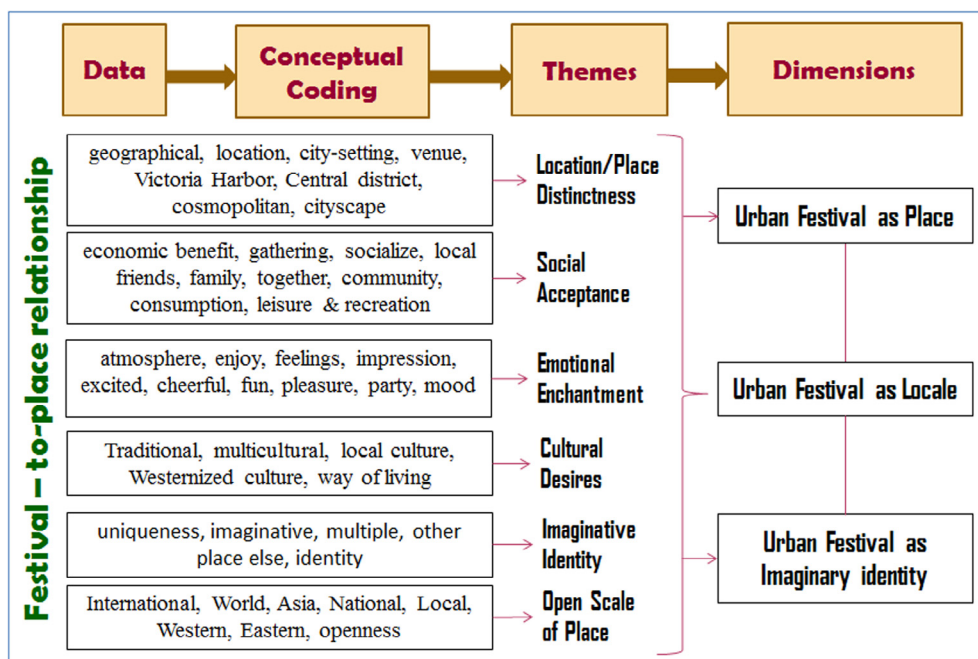


Fig. 2. Process of data analysis.

Findings

The emergent themes/dimensions become abstract constructs aiming to reflect a set of shared meanings (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Three dimensions denoting the intertwined relationships between the meanings of festival and place conceptions were evident in the transcripts.

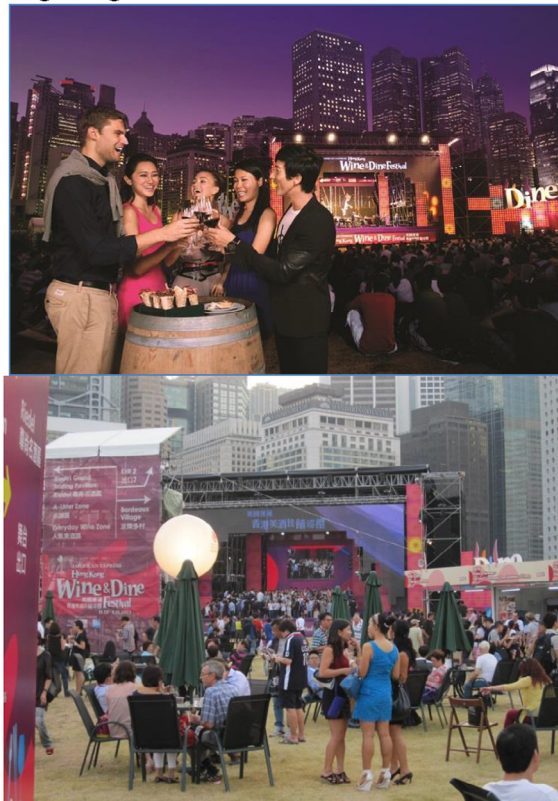


Fig. 3. Hong Kong Wine & Dine Festival 2013 was hosted in Central.

Urban festival as place

The Hong Kong Wine & Dine Festival is held at the city commercial and financial centre: right in front of the renowned Victoria Harbour, with sparkly city skylines against the Central district. The promoter intentionally associates this festival location with the symbolic meaning of Hong Kong where the cityscape is highlighted as one of its key cosmopolitan enticement. Behind the iconic backdrop, the meanings of the festival were perceived outside the realm of everyday life, and the location distinctiveness of Hong Kong (Fig. 3).

Several tourists expressed their perceptions of the festival as follows:

I think the event has a fantastic setting; it is quite unusual to have this type of location setting. The festival is held in a place where the cityscape view of Hong Kong can be enjoyed, which is just behind you. It is an exceptional exhibition of Hong Kong's beauty. (Interviewee 1)

This is our first time in Hong Kong. We have been in [mainland] China for a week, and we will be flying out by midnight. The festival we attended today is what we perceive Hong Kong to be. It is what we imagine Hong Kong to be, which is in front of the city view of Victoria Harbour. (Interviewee 4)

Participants described their experiences:

Hong Kong so special is its cosmopolitan setting, and this kind of concentrate attracts different groups of people to come to the festival. Thus, Hong Kong itself is a perfect location presenting wine, food and people from all over the world. (Interviewee 3)

Many events on Hong Kong event calendar are not originated from Hong Kong, but it is successful because Hong Kong is a destination, the atmosphere of the place that attracts people to come. (Interviewee 11)

Central District is geographically situated in the central business area in the heart of Hong Kong Island. Hong Kong characterizes its core values as “Central District Values” (Chu, 2010, p. 99) to underline its successful commercial and financial achievements over the decades. The festival has created a sense of place-specific ambience and produced a public space for festival goers to experience both the physical location as well as the situation of the city life. The effort exerted by the government authority to consolidate the goodness of local resources (i.e., a fascinate location of Central harbourfront) is pivotal to the successful presentation of the festive and the place making. Observing the responses from the participants, the festival has been viewed as an acceptable form of connotation to serve the purpose of the government to accelerate tourists' experience in a place.



Fig. 4. Title sponsor of HKWDF 2013.

Urban festival as locale

Besides the exceptional location, the festival has brought together other community resources and expertise on related (i.e., wine and catering sectors) and unrelated (i.e., American Express as title sponsor for the festival (see Fig. 4)) groups or individuals (i.e., artists or performers) to promote the festival and place. Moreover, some local catering companies in other food districts have jointly promoted the culinary culture of the city during the festival. Renowned food districts, such as Lan Kwai Fong and SoHo Bar Area, Lei Yue Mun Seafood Market and Stanley Plaza, have organised intra-district campaigns to feature fine wines, delicacies and performances around the food, wine and music theme. As Hong Kong Tourism Board has recorded that the hotel, catering and travel sectors were excited in rolling out special offers, launching culinary tours and special-interest classes, all through the November (HKTB, 2013). Engaging those concerned local parties has allowed Hong Kong Tourism Board to assimilate all community resources into a holistic place experience of Hong Kong as Asia's culinary capital. A festival participant stated,

I think this event can be replicated in other cities in Asia. The concept of this event is not destination-specific. For example, Australia and Singapore both hold this type of event. However, I think the characteristics that distinguish Hong Kong is the unity of different food-, wine- and event-related industries including local catering companies, hotels, wine cellars, chef associations, inbound tour companies, performing artists and partners to make this festival more prominent and noticeable. (Interviewee 16)

With lavish stage entertainment programs, live pop music performance and celebrating activities (see Fig. 5), the festival enables both tourists and local people to enjoy a party-like atmosphere with wine tasting and food sampling. Festival-goers described their experiences:

Today is very festive, it seems everyone is excited, and for people who enjoy the wine, they really take time to understand the wine, for people who like the food, they try all kinds of food. They all look cheerful and pleasurable. (Interviewee 18)

This event provides an opportunity for the visitors to explore extremely good food and wine from all around the world. I believe that more people will come and join the recreational event during a relaxing night. The festival provides a very good theme for recreation [with] family and friends. (Interviewee 17)

The contributions of the festival extend beyond the creation of local employment and business opportunities. It consolidates social vitalities and provides a pleasurable socializing place and space across the region.

Nevertheless, an issue was brought up by some interviewees, concerning the imported food and wine, as well as the format of the activities (see Fig. 6), they criticized that Hong Kong Wine & Dine Festival may not fully reflect the local lifestyle, particularly that of the ordinary local people:

I think it is an international event, it does not give an insight of local life of Hong Kong, and it is much more inclined to international style of event. (Interviewee 14).

The festival today does uplift the profile of high standard of Hong Kong; however, I think this event probably applies only to expatriates or a particular group of locals who earn a better living here. (Interviewee 10)

Apparently, the festival is a government-initiated tourist activity, purposefully designed for tourist to experience the multicultural city-life of Hong Kong. The targeted audience of the festival might not be the local grass-roots level. It is logically acceptable that the organizer prefer to hide those less palatable elements of the city and stress on the intended high-quality city experience for festival goers.



Fig. 5. Party-like celebration at HKWDF.



Fig. 6. Recreational activity at HKWDF.

Urban festival as imaginary identity

The Hong Kong government has continually promoted the city as ‘Asia’s World City’ over the years. This approach comprises positioning Hong Kong as “a cosmopolitan city offering global connectivity, security and rich diversity” (HKSAR, 2010, p. 1). As a result of this shared vision in promoting the social and cultural existence, Hong Kong Wine & Dine Festival has been effectively featured as a practical achievement in demonstrating the blend of global culture. In the opening speech of the 2013 event, Mr. John Tsang, the former Financial Secretary of Hong Kong, reinforced the message that Hong Kong is ‘Asia’s World City’ in front of

international delegates:

Our refined tastes and cultural blend of East and West make Hong Kong a great place to pair Chinese and Asian cuisine with different wines from around the world. Many of our thousands of restaurants, top class hotels and local dim sum eateries have been awarded prestigious Michelin stars. Variety really is the spice of life here in Asia's World City.

Through the organization of the festival, the multicultural dimension of place meaning of Hong Kong has been subtly but intentionally exposed to the world audience. Respondents, for example, referred to their festival experiences as being multicultural:

I found many different cultures are meeting in Hong Kong. In Japan, we only have Japanese culture, but in Hong Kong, there are many foreign people. I guess they come from different parts of the world such as Europe, America and of course some others from Asia. It's strange for me. (Interviewee 5)

This event embodies the whole world's cuisine plate. This festival helps Hong Kong establish itself as the global city and exemplifies that people of [multiple cultures] from any place can gather in one place to socialise and mingle. (Interviewee 8)

This interesting event promotes Hong Kong as it showcases international products. The festival draws the attention of tourists from all around the world together in one place. It certainly reflects Hong Kong as Asia's World City, from its international food, wine and people. (Interviewee 16) (see Fig. 7).

Compared with other cities in Asia, Hong Kong demonstrates a dynamic multicultural sense of place in which international cuisine, wineries and lifestyle can be found and are promoted widely by the government. Not only limited to showcasing wines from national and international wineries, approximately 80 food booths served Chinese and Western cuisine. Those food booths exhibited signature dishes from hotels and restaurants, barbecue specialties, appetizers, sweet treats and others, which represented an important element to project Hong Kong's global lifestyle. Interviewees pointed out:

In comparison with other cities in mainland China, Hong Kong is an open society with a strong mix of Eastern and Western cultures. A large population of international expatriates work and live in Hong Kong. Wine, which reflects a significant part of the Western lifestyle, is considered an inseparable part of a meal. This way of living influences some of the local people in Hong Kong to a certain extent. Thus, the festival actually reflects that part of Hong Kong culture. (Interviewee 13)

The event today reflects a more international culture and shows the Western taste of Hong Kong. As observed from today's event, the wine, food as well as the on-site entertainment activities are mainly imported or replicated from Western countries. (Interviewee 7)

The place identity of Hong Kong presented by the festival is much more inclined to Western taste as observed by some respondent:

I believe it's Hong Kong people who decided to organize this festival. For me this is not China, I could be sitting anywhere in Europe and then it will be more likely to my experience today. But, I am a bit surprised we found this kind of festival experience in Hong Kong. So, I think Hong Kong is the Western spot in Asia. (Interviewee 9)

While it [the festival] did not much here have anything to the local culture of Hong Kong I think. If you look for the food and wine, it is imported from Europe or America, I don't think it has much to do with local culture. (Interviewee 6)

It is no longer surprising for Western tourists to find the festival similar to the one held in their home countries. Hong Kong Wine & Dine Festival is in fact, largely framed as social and cultural uniformity which intends to create a sense of undifferentiated spaces for tourists. Nonetheless, in order to overcome the impairment of a sense of locality, the festival organizer has invited renowned Hong Kong-based fashion designer Vivienne Tam to design four giant wine bottles, and put them on display (see Fig. 8). The four Chinese-themed giant wine bottles displayed in the central area of the festival venue deepened the distinctive sense of place of Hong Kong, and to a certain extent, were effectively used to overcome the perception of a generic place-nonspecific food and wine festival hosted



Fig. 7. International wine and food sold in the booths at HKWDF.



Fig. 8. Chinese-themed giant bottle decoration designed by Vivienne Tam.

in other cities worldwide. The imaginary identity of Hong Kong as Asia’s World City were further uplifted.

Conclusion

Our research has explored the widely used place-based concepts in relation to festival impacts studies. In line with the view that “place is a centre of meaning constructed by experience” (Tuan, 1975, p. 152), the idea of identifying and articulating the socio-cultural meanings of festivals as a means of interpreting the effect of urban festival on the notions of place is conceptually reasonable. Through the grounded theory method of theoretical categorizations and justifications, our study proposes an integrative conceptual framework to encapsulate the festival-to-place relationship. Fig. 9 illustrates our proposed elements denoted to explain the interconnected festival-to-place theoretical structure, namely environmental, social, and ideological. The environmental element refers to those tangible aspects of a place, its institutions and localization where the festival is held. Social element concerns about the material settings for the daily actions and social interactions of people that created or were highlighted by festival organizers or hosts. Ideological element denotes the subjective and objective feelings and ideas towards a place through the actual on-site experience. In fact, these three elements of festival-to-place connotations should not be regarded separately in a strict manner. The three elements interlace with one another. Their meanings are connected to each and others and extend beyond its own category when interpreting the festival-to-place relationship. Whereas the environmental meaning (physical location) of place is considered as the core body of elements to explain the relationship as it reflects the functional meaning of a place; yet it should interact with other bodies of element (e.g., social and ideological) so as to merge the emotional and cognitive meanings of place, and eventually to form a comprehensive understandings of the allied connexion between festival and place.

Inevitably, the Hong Kong Wine and Dine Festival is a kind of dynamic festive activity that could provide an “urban spectacle” (Gotham, 2005) to tourists, and allows a close interaction with local community to explore the meanings of place. However, in light of the place-nonspecific inauthentic culture presented, the festival is hardly perceived as a significant source of elements for place making under the existing tourism literature. Yet, through the creation of temporarily space for both tourists and local community, the festival has created shared experiences and shared values with the festival goers. Ultimately, ‘festivalisation’ is intimately linked to the process of place making (Richards & Palmer, 2010). On the same token, our study indicates that place could be irrelevant, while tourism may be responsible for exacerbating differences that are contrary to the wider socio-cultural discourses behind tourism development in a place. The case of Hong Kong Wine & Dine Festival demonstrates how festivals reflect the complex social structure in a place, and providing a proof regarding the dynamic and complex relationship between festival tourism and notion of place.

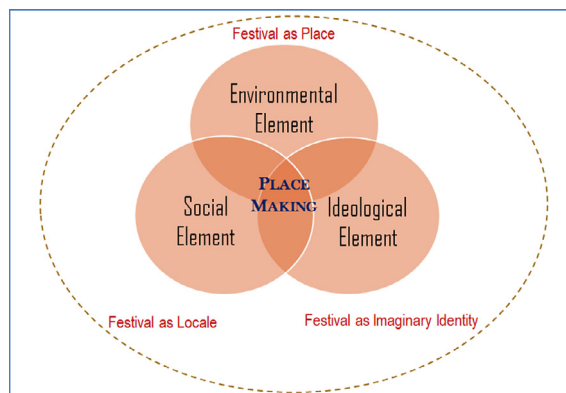


Fig. 9. Festival-to-place conceptual framework.

Our research has also demonstrated that the festival endorses the place making strategy to confirm Hong Kong's multiculturalism and open-city place positioning. By emphasizing the international "open sense of place" (Larsen & Johnson, 2011), the festival enlarges the highly modernistic cultural aspects of the place. Subjected to the city's unique historical backdrop, it has been presented as sharply different from the nationwide Chinese cultural dimension of place meanings. The meanings created by the festival emphasised mainly on Hong Kong's multicultural character, are obviously shaped toward the International scale of place notion instead of the national side of place meanings.

Likewise, the festival demonstrates how the multicultural lifestyle of a community can be shaped through the concept of "tourism imaginaries" (Chronis, 2012) which is commonly adopted by city promoter to reinforce the "competing ideologies" of a place. Indeed, certain government authorities deliberately manipulate local lifestyles and even reproduce or invent traditions in a commercial form to enhance the appeal of a place. As identified by a number of festival participants, local people who live in the less privileged areas with low average household income may not participate in such Westernised activities. However, under such a "carnival mask" (Gotham, 2005), tourists and those targeted local community could still develop a hedonistic and positive emotional attachment to place while they participate in these recreational activities. Hence, our study supports the argument that leisure and tourism are a potential vehicle to establish and affirm the meanings of a place. Precisely, urban festival could be manipulated as an effective means for claiming and presenting a notion of place. The hybridised city lifestyle, such as the HKWDF is intentionally designed and consciously projected to the outside world to promote the preferred ideology of a place. The case of Hong Kong Wine & Dine Festival is merely one of the many examples in urban places to demonstrate the role of festival tourism in place making.

This study enhances the theoretical awareness that interpreting the effects of promoting festival tourism from an economic perspective may not completely reveal the intrinsic values of tourism promotion on a certain place. The intertwined relationship between the socio-cultural meanings of festivals and notions of place such as the case used in this study is well beyond the festival impacts studies from the cost-and-benefit practical approach. Festival tourism might be a niche in the field of tourism management studies because of its less legitimate role in drawing a large volume of tourist demand. Nevertheless, the underlying meanings of festivals and their power to shape a meaningful place from a wider social science perspective should not be underestimated.

The current study has several limitations. The study results may be limited as only tourists were sampled. It would be interesting to include the views of local residents and to compare their perceived meanings of festival and place. Also, questions on the tourists' purpose of the visit could be included which allow the comparisons of views among business, leisure and VFR tourists.

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