

## **A Review of Festival and Event Motivation Studies<sup>1</sup>**

In the past couple of decades, festival and event tourism has been one of the fastest growing sections of the world leisure industry (Getz, 1991; Nicholson & Pearce, 2001), and has received increasing attention by academic researchers. In addition to commonly targeted topics such as economic impact, marketing strategies of mega-events, and festival management (Getz, 1999; Gnoth & Anwar, 2000; Raltson & Hamilton, 1992; Ritchie, 1984), there is a growing stream of research focusing on the motivations of attendees. It has been agreed that understanding motivations, or the “internal factor that arouses, directs, and integrates a person’s behavior” (Iso-Ahola 1980, cited in Crompton & McKay, 1997, p. 425), leads to better planning and marketing of festivals and events, and better segmentation of participants.

The reasons to conduct festival and event motivation studies were aptly articulated by Crompton and McKay (1997). They believed that studying festival and event motivation is a key to designing offerings for event attendees, a way to monitor satisfaction, and a tool for understanding attendees’ decision-making processes. The present note attempts to briefly review motivational studies related to festival and event tourism. It is believed that such an effort will help identify existing theoretical and methodological problems, and clarify future research directions.

The authors, for the purpose of this study, defined “event and festival tourism” as activities, planning, and management practices associated with public, themed occasions. Although some authors stress the distinction between motive and motivation,

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with motive referring to a generic behavioral energizer, and motivation as object-specific (Gnoth, 1997), this note uses the two terms interchangeably.

### Conceptual Background

Getz (1991, p. 85) linked Maslow's widely cited hierarchy of human needs to tourists' generic travel motivations, and benefits an event and festival may provide. In so doing, Getz suggested that visitors' needs and travel motivations may be met by participating in festivals and special events. Put differently, attending events and festivals is an effective way to satisfy one's social-psychological needs. The connection between tourists' social-psychological needs and their event participation motivation has provided a meaningful foundation for studies on festival and event motivation (Crompton, 2003).

A majority of the festival and event motivation studies have been conducted under the theoretical framework of travel motivation research (Backman, Backman, Uysal, & Sunshine, 1995; Getz, 1991; Nicholson & Pearce, 2001; Scott, 1996), which has been conceptually grounded on both the seeking-escape dichotomy (Iso-Ahola, 1980, 1982; Mannell & Iso-Ahola, 1987), and push-pull model (Dann, 1977; 1981; Crompton, 1979). Research in the context of festival and event tourism has shown that both of these conceptualizations can provide appropriate guidance for motive measurement, though from different perspectives (Crompton & McKay, 1997; Kim & Chalip, 2004; Scott, 1996).

### Motives of Festival and Event Attendees

To date, there has been an emerging, yet small body of literature on event-goers' motivation (see Table 1 for a chronological list). Besides the most straightforward motivation question "Why do they come?", these studies have also asked "Who are

they?” (visitors’ demographic profile), “ Are they satisfied?” (attendees’ satisfaction), and “What activities do they participate in?” (behavioral characteristics). In many cases, the researchers associated motivation characteristics with demographics, satisfaction, and behavioral indicators, with the aim to answer the “So what?” type of questions (i.e., research and practical implications). At a more sophisticated level, some researchers have placed more emphasis on determining “Are the findings generalizable?” and “How to structure the theoretical framework?” (Crompton & McKay, 1997; Nicholson & Pearce, 1999; 2001; Scott, 1996).

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### *Early Discoveries*

Ralston and Crompton (1988, in Getz, 1991) arguably conducted the first study dealing specifically with event participants’ motivation. Forty-eight motive statements were developed, with a five-point Likert-type Scale used to measure the importance of each item. No discreet market segment (i.e., groups with the same demographic background sharing similar motivation patterns) was identified. As a conclusion, the researchers suggested that “motivation statement[s] were generic across all groups” (Ralston & Crompton, 1988, cited in Uysal, Backman, Backman, & Pott, 1991, p. 204).

After Ralston and Crompton (1988), several researchers soon joined the discussion related to festival and event motivation. Uysal *et al.* (1991), and later Backman *et al.* (1995), attempted to examine demographic characteristics, motivations and activities of tourists who went on a festival/special event/exhibition trip, using the 1985 U.S. Pleasure Travel Market data. Twelve motive items were factor analyzed, with five dimensions of motivation being identified. Some differences in motivations were

revealed across demographic groups. For instance, it was suggested that excitement is less likely to be the travel motivation of senior and married festival attendees. It was also found that the lowest income group (i.e., people with income less than \$40,000) is more likely to be motivated by attending festivals to socialize while less likely to attend high-risk activities. Such findings implied that event participants are heterogeneous groups and thus require segmentation.

In the first issue of "Festival Management & Event Tourism", two papers (Uysal, Gahan, & Martin, 1993; Mohr, Backman, Gahan, & Backman, 1993) on South Carolina events were considered as "a starting point for understanding the motivations people have for attending festivals" (Scott, 1996, p. 122). Using the 1991 Corn Festival as a study case, Uysal *et al.* reduced a set of 24 motivations to five factors. Consistent with previous studies, no systematic differences emerged when comparing motivational factors to demographic variables. Their findings supported Mannell and Iso-Ahola's (1987) "seek-escape" framework on travel motivation.

In the same vein, Mohr *et al.* (1993) studied a hot air balloon festival and identified a similar cluster of motivation subscales, though in a different order. Motivations were found to be a function of visitor types. Significant differences existed between first time and repeat visitors with respect to the motivation dimensions of "excitement" and "event novelty", and their corresponding satisfaction levels. Specifically, the attendees who never went to other festivals, but were repeat visitors to the hot air balloon festival showed a unique motivation structure. This group was mostly motivated by the need for excitement, while least motivated by event novelty. Again, no significant differences were identified in motivations with regard to demographic variables.

Overall, the contribution of these pioneering festival and event motivation studies lies in two aspects: 1) A research framework for surveying festival and event motivation was developed, and 2) the relationships between motivation and other variables were investigated. Similar research design and methods were employed in these projects: The authors first developed a list of motivation items and asked respondents to indicate the importance of each item in their festival-attending decision; the results were then factor analyzed into several dimensions; and finally statistical tools (i.e., ANOVA or MCA) were used to identify relationships between these motivation dimensions with selected event or demographic variables. Admittedly, most studies at this stage were descriptive in nature, and lacked theoretical support from other fields (i.e., psychology, sociology, and marketing).

### *Cross-culture Testing*

Schneider and Backman (1996) first proposed the necessity of cross-cultural studies. Their research on a Jordanian festival revealed a motivation factor structure similar to the North American studies. The authors concluded that at least between Arabs and North Americans, there is “a draw to festivals that supersedes cultural boundaries” (p. 144). This conclusion was later supported by studies on more diverse geographic locations, such as Italy (Formica & Murrmann, 1998; Formica & Uysal, 1996; Formica & Uysal, 1998), South Korea (Lee, 2000; Lee, Lee, & Wicks, 2004), and China (Dewar, Meyer, & Li, 2000).

The Umbria Jazz Festival in Italy gave Formica and Uysal (1996) an opportunity to compare the motivation patterns between resident and non-resident attendees. Significant differences between locals and out-of-the-region visitors were identified with regard to the motivation factors of “socialization” and “entertainment.” It was concluded

that residents tended to be more motivated by the factor “socialization,” while non-residents were more likely to be driven by the factor “entertainment.”

In a later study, Formica and Uysal (1998) targeted an international cultural-historical event, the Spoleto Festival in Italy. Behavioral, motivational, and demographic characteristics of visitors were explored, and six motive factors were obtained. Based on motivational behaviors, two groups of attendees were identified: enthusiasts and moderates. The former were typically older, wealthier, and married attendees, while the latter was characterized by single participants who were younger in age, and had lower incomes.

#### *Exploration of Generalizability*

Another group of tourism scholars have examined generalizability issues related to festival attendees' motivations. Essentially, the question they raised is: Do people go to different events with different motivations? To answer this question, researchers have to investigate multiple events, instead of a single one. Interestingly, conflicting conclusions have been reached: Scott (1996), and Nicholson and Pearce (1999; 2001) found that festival and event motivations could be context-specific, while Crompton and McKay (1997) did not find significant differences across various events. As a result, no universal motivation scale has been identified yet.

Scott (1996) studied three events in Northeast Ohio. With a similar methodological approach as Uysal *et al.* (1993) and Mohr *et al.* (1993), Scott reported slightly different motivation dimensions. The most notable finding was that attendees ascribed disparate importance to all motivation factors, varying by festivals types. No relationships were revealed between past visitation and motivations, with the exception of the factor “curiosity.” First-time visitors were far more likely to be motivated by

“curiosity” than repeat visitors. The author thus concluded that “festival type was a far better predictor of people’s motivations than past experience” (p. 128).

With the objective to “assess the extent to which the perceived relevance of motives changed across different types of events” (p. 429), Crompton and McKay (1997) studied the 10-day Fiesta festival in San Antonio, Texas. The authors classified activities of this festival into five categories (parades / carnivals, pageants / balls, food oriented events, musical events, and museums / exhibits / shows), and compared the strengths of the motives associated with the five categories. From an overall perspective, it was concluded that different events may satisfy a similar set of motives, though to varying degrees. The authors maintained that these results supported the belief that “a festival visitation decision is likely to be a result of multiple simultaneous motives” (p. 436). However, it has been argued (Nicholson & Pearce, 2001) that one assumption in this study could be problematic: Crompton and McKay treated the five different categories within the festival as different types of events, while it could be argued that they were actually different activities within one single festival.

Findings in Crompton and McKay (1999) also further validated Iso-Ahola’s seek-escape dichotomy. Although the two forces intertwined with each other, the seeking dimension seemed to be much more important to festival participants. These results led the authors to the argument that festivals may be more appropriately considered as recreation, rather than tourism offerings.

Nicholson and Pearce (2001) criticized the ad hoc basis of earlier studies on event motivation, and advocated the need for “a more systematic and comprehensive approach to the analysis of the motivations of event-goers, one that moves beyond the study of individual events to explore issues of greater generality and begins to examine

the broader characteristics of event tourism per se” (p. 449). With this as an objective of their study, the authors compared visitor motivations at four New Zealand events. Efforts were made to “give more weight and greater visibility to events per se as a distinctive phenomenon” (p. 449), by employing an open-ended question and two event-specific factors in the motivation item list. Adding the open-ended question (“Why did you come to this event?”) was a methodological breakthrough, as the incorporation of an unstructured method helped provide richer data and reduce inherent bias and irrelevance. As a result, a much more complex and diverse motivation pattern across different events was reported, with little evidence yet of generic event motivations. It was hence concluded that event-specific factors are especially important in attracting festival attendees. The study’s findings challenged the traditional assumption that event motivation studies are simply festival case studies of travel motivation theories.

#### *Inputs from Sport Marketing Literature*

If we look beyond the tourism scope, some sports marketing studies have brought valuable insights to this discussion. Swanson Gwinner, Larson, and Janda (2003) explored the impact of four individual psychological motivations on college students’ reported patronage behaviors and verbal recommendations toward a sporting event. Unlike their tourism colleagues, Swanson *et al.* (2003) investigated potential event attendees rather than actual on-site participants. The four motivation scales (team identification, eustress, group affiliation, and self-esteem enhancement), were developed from previous literature as generic sporting event motivations, and each scale incorporated several motivation items. It was revealed that “when motivated by team identification, group affiliation, and self-esteem enhancement, there is a significant, direct relationship with intent to attend sporting events for both men and women” (p.

160). Also worth noting is the concept of “team identification”, which may be interpreted as “local pride” in a destination context. None of the aforementioned tourism studies included this construct in their motivation item list, although it makes conceptual sense that people may attend a local festival to demonstrate pride in their community. A similar finding was reported by Li (2003), whose investigation of the 2002 Jacksonville Riverwalk Festival in North Carolina showed that supporting re-development in the downtown area was a major reason for attending the festival.

Another sport marketing study by Kim and Chalip (2004) tested the effect of levels of fan motives, travel motivation, and potential attendees’ background on their desire to attend and their sense of whether it is feasible to attend the FIFA World Cup. The authors suggested that the motivation for outbound travel and the motivation to attend sporting events should be delineated in the case of an international sporting mega-event. Overall, the sport marketing literature reveals that: 1) a generic motivation scale for sporting events has been identified and has been broadly applied. In contrast, the existence of universal event motivations is still under debate in the tourism domain; 2) potential attendees should also be taken into consideration, as to draw a more complete picture of participants’ motivational behavior; and 3) travel motive and event motive may need to be differentiated under certain circumstances.

### Discussion

A review of the literature on festival and event motivation indicates that a fairly consistent and practical research framework has been established, although a universal motivation scale is yet to emerge. This stream of research also boasts a good tradition of cross-culture testing, as nine out of the sixteen studies reviewed in this paper were held in international destinations outside the U.S.

As our knowledge about event and festival motivation has accumulated over time, research has progressed beyond simple case studies of motivation theories.

Individualistic characteristics of event motivation have emerged, partly because of the hybrid nature of festivals as both recreation (for the local residents) and tourism offerings (for visitors) (Crompton & McKay, 1997). However, no research has been done on the comparison of general travel motivation and festival and event motivation. From a methodological perspective, this type of comparison could hardly be conducted without the identification of a universal scale for measuring motivations to attend festivals and events.

Most studies reviewed in this paper are still descriptive case studies on an ad hoc basis. A gap seems to exist between these research findings and systematic theory building. It is suggested that more efforts in theoretical conceptualization are needed for understanding festival and event attendees' motivations. The related psychology, sociology, marketing, and sport marketing literature may provide some useful insights on this issue. Moreover, most festival and event motivation studies have been conducted by a small group of authors. The involvement of more researchers with more diverse backgrounds and disciplinary approaches, and the employment of new research methodologies is strongly encouraged.

Further, from a meta-theoretical perspective, it can be seen that current festival and event motivation research has been dominated by a naturalistic tradition, with a strong emphasis on formal logic analysis and quantitative methods (Deshpande, 1983; Peter & Olson, 1983). Nicholson and Pearce (2000, 2001) broke some ground in this area by employing unstructured methodology as part of their motivation measurements. It has been suggested that for topics whose theoretical foundation is less than robust,

qualitative approaches are preferred, as they can generate more complete unbiased motivational information (Dann & Phillips 2000). Overall, it is believed that combining quantitative and qualitative methods may be helpful in our knowledge pursuits in different areas.

### Conclusion

This note presented a comprehensive, though not exhaustive review on extant festival and event motivation studies. The authors categorized literature on this topic into three major themes: earlier discoveries, cross-culture testing, and exploration of generalizability. Contributions from sports marketing studies were also briefly discussed. The review shows a fairly consistent and practical research framework for festival and event motivation studies, which has been traditionally dominated by quantitative methods. It is recommended that a universal scale for measuring festival and event motivation be created with the adoption of both quantitative and qualitative instruments. It would be helpful to position this particular stream of research in the broader stream of travel motivation studies. Moreover, serious efforts on theory and model building should be strongly encouraged, and interdisciplinary inputs are welcomed in future studies.

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Table 1. A Summary of Selected Studies on Festival and Event Motivation

Researchers	Delineated factors	Event name and site	Methodology
Ralston & Crompton (1988)	Stimulus seeking; family togetherness; social contact; meeting or observing new people; learning and discovery; escape from personal and social pressures; and nostalgia	1987 Dickens on the Strand, Galveston, USA	48 statements 5-point Likert Scale
Uysal et al. (1991) Backman et al. (1995)	Excitement; external; family; socializing; relaxation	Pleasure Travel Market Survey (1985), USA	12 motive items
Uysal et al. (1993)	Escape; excitement/thrills; event novelty; socialization; family togetherness	Corn Festival, South Carolina, USA	24 statements 5-point Likert Scale
Mohr et al. (1993)	Socialization; escape; family togetherness; excitement/uniqueness; event novelty	Freedom Weekend Aloft, South Carolina, USA	23 motive items 5-point Likert Scale
Scott (1996)	Nature appreciation; event excitement; sociability; family togetherness; curiosity; escape	BugFest, Holiday Lights Festival, and Maple Sugaring Festival, Ohio, USA	25 motive items 5-point Likert Scale
Formica & Uysal (1996)	Excitement/thrills; socialization; entertainment; event novelty; family togetherness	Umbria Jazz Festival, Italy	23 motive items 5-point Likert Scale
Schneider & Backman (1996)	Family togetherness/socialization; social leisure; festival attributes; escape; event excitement	Jerish Festival, Jordan	23 motive items 5-point Likert Scale
Crompton & Mckay (1997)	Cultural exploration; novelty /regression; gregariousness; recover equilibrium; known-group socialization; external interaction /socialization	Fiesta in San Antonio, Texas, USA	31 motive items 5-point Likert Scale
Formica & Uysal (1998) Formica & Murrmann (1998)	Socialization /entertainment; event attraction/excitement; group togetherness; cultural / historical; family togetherness; site novelty	Spoletto Festival, Italy	23 motive items 5-point Likert Scale

(cont'd)

Researchers	Delineated factors	Event name and site	Methodology
Nicholson & Pearce (2000; 2001)	External interaction/socialization; novelty/uniqueness; escape; family Socialization; novelty/uniqueness; entertainment/excitement; escape; family Novelty/uniqueness; socialization; specifics; escape; family Specifics/entertainment; escape; variety; novelty/uniqueness; family; socialization	Marlborough Wine, Food and Music Festival, Hokitika Wildfoods Festival  Warbirds over Wanaka,  New Zealand Gold Guitar Awards, New Zealand	Open ended question 20 motive items 5-point Likert Scale
Lee (2000)	Cultural exploration; escape; novelty; event attractions; family togetherness; external group socialization; known-group socialization	'98 Kyongju World Cultural Expo., South Korea	34 motive items 5-point Likert Scale
Dewar et al. (2001)	Event novelty; escape; socialization; family togetherness; excitement/thrills	Harbin Ice and Sculpture and Snow Festival, P. R. China	23 motive items 5-point Likert Scale
Lee et al. (2004)	Cultural exploration; family togetherness; novelty; escape (recover equilibrium); event attractions; socialization	2000 Kyongju World Cultural Expo., South Korea	34 motive items 5-point Likert Scale

*Note.* Partly adapted from "Segmentation of festival motivation by nationality and satisfaction," by C. K. Lee, Y. K. Lee, and B. E. Wicks, 2004, *Tourism Management*, 25(1). p. 63.