3 Event and experience design

Learning objectives

On completion of this chapter, you will be able to:

➤ Recognise the benefits and potential impact of systematic event design

➤ Explain the nature and significance of the event experience and recognise the associated challenge in terms of event design

➤ Provide an understanding of how to conceptualise an event and recognise the importance of a sound event concept

➤ Explain how an event concept is supported and reinforced by theming and other aspects of event design

➤ Provide an understanding of the key event design principles

➤ Explain the role of setting, staging and logistics

➤ Describe the link between event design and event outcomes.

Event design is an important aspect of planned events, and events have to power to transform individuals. An emerging focus in event design is the focus on meanings and event experiences (Getz & Page, 2016). Event design, a core 'domain' or function of event management offers the potential to achieve, or at least facilitate these transformations. The emergence of the so-called transformation economy has been at least partly responsible for a movement in the focus of planned events beyond extraordinary experiences towards experiences that could be regarded as transformative or even life-changing. Described as peak experiences, these transformational events have important implications for event design.

? *What other societal changes can you think of that support or are consistent with the emerging focus on transformational events?*

The event experience

Event experiences are the essence of planned events. The potential impact of those experiences can be significant, particularly in the power of:

- Exhibitions and conventions to **spark the imagination**
- Music and entertainment festivals to **engage the senses**
- Conferences and other business events to **stimulate the intellect**
- Commemorative events to **invoke emotions**
- Sporting events to **stir passions and loyalties**
- Cultural and religious events to transform people and to **enliven the spirit.**

The key challenge for an event designer is to create or at least facilitate one or more event experiences in a way that matches or exceeds the expectations of event attendees. In this regard, the event designer may seek to provide a rich experience with which attendees can relax and enjoy or create an environment that provides the ingredients and the circumstances in which attendees can actively participate and become co-creators of that experience in a more active and meaningful way. Regardless of the approach, event design can be a crucial ingredient in the overall success of an event.

? *What type of experience is someone likely to be seeking when they attend a community cultural festival? What event elements or activities should be provided to enhance that experience and make it more memorable?*

Frameworks to guide the design of event experiences

Transforming events framework

In a recent study, Steriopoulos and Wrathall (2021) conducted in-depth interviews with event experts on how the industry is transforming post COVID-19. Based on the findings, the researchers developed a framework

highlighting key priorities that influence change in industry. The key concepts that resulted from the study are:

- the need for humans to socially connect and protect the environment;
- the design of meaningful event experiences;
- the capacity to adapt to complex event situations while remain committed to ongoing learning; and
- the need for professionals to look after their personal and professional wellbeing.
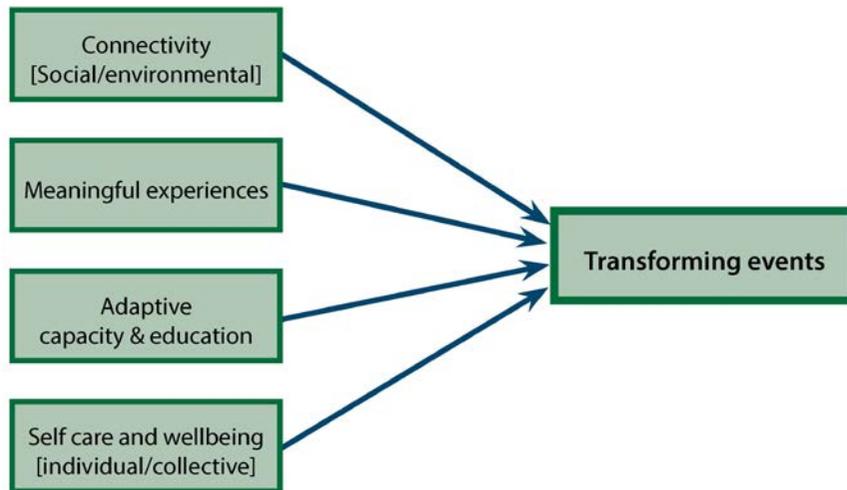
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Figure 3.1: A conceptual framework on transforming events (Source: Steriopoulos & Wrathall, 2021)

The PERMA Model

Crucial to the process of creating an event experience that is consistent with attendee expectations is the capacity of event designers to empathize with event attendees. Hence, an event designer needs to be able to understand what attendees want and what they don't want, what motivates them and what frustrates them. Accordingly, there is a new focus in event design which arises partly from positive psychology, emphasising well-being and the development of an engaging, purposeful, and worthwhile life. Specifically, one type of event that focuses on emotional engagement is the commemorative.