

# **Extracting Meanings of Event Tourist Experiences: A Phenomenological Exploration of Limassol Carnival**

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## **Abstract**

The common examination of the event and tourism experience can reveal the attached meanings that exemplify the valued characteristics of a destination in the perceptions of tourists. From this standpoint, this study employed a phenomenological approach conducting eight unstructured interviews to explore the experience and assigned meanings of tourists who attended the carnival in Limassol, Cyprus. Results indicate that the meanings of tourist experiences in the carnival were extracted as continuously evolving products shaped by the interaction of two interrelated dramaturgical states, namely the generalized sociality and perceived community metamorphosis, and the interfering dimension of obstruction referring to organizational aspects constraining the tourist experience. The findings of this exploratory phenomenological study bring into the fore the need for more effectively incorporating events into a destination's product mix by designing experiences that leverage event meanings in synergy with unique destination features, thereby enhancing their impact on tourists. On these grounds, it is argued that the phenomenological perspective applied on the study of event tourism can enable destination marketing and management to develop a joint framework for cross-leveraging events and destination assets, hence, synergistically optimizing both social and tourism ends for host destinations. To this end, the study highlights the need for future research to start exploring systematically the relationship between the meanings of tourist experiences and the characteristics of a destination's product mix.

**Keywords:** carnival, experience, meaning, phenomenology, dramaturgy, liminality, event leverage

## **1. Introduction**

Although the examination of the antecedents and characteristics of the tourist and leisure experience has received considerable research attention (Morgan, Lugosi, & Ritchie, 2010; Quan & Wang, 2004; Ritchie & Hudson, 2009; Ryan, 2002; Tung & Ritchie, 2011; Uriely, 2005; Walls, Okumus, & Wang, 2011; Walls et al., 2011), there is little work on exploring the experience of tourists who participate in, or attend events. Events have the capacity to instantiate meanings for people and communities, and hence, intensify the experience of tourists at a destination. According to Getz (2008), the meanings attached to events and event tourism experiences are both an integral part of the experience and are antecedents to future tourism behavior. The convergence of events with tourism therefore makes it imperative to understand the experience of event tourists in order to design and leverage meaningful event tourist experiences. In doing so, as Getz (2008) noted, both the event and the travel experience have to be understood in concert.

In this regard, phenomenology is a seminal conceptual and methodological line of thought that can be used for examining in-depth the event tourism experience. The goal of phenomenology is to enlarge and deepen understanding of the range of immediate experiences (Spiegelberg, 1982). Phenomenological inquiry is a direct description of experience without taking account of its psychological origin (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Phenomenology, therefore, is a critical reflection on conscious experience, rather than subconscious motivation, and is designed to uncover the essential invariant features of that experience (Jopling, 1996).

The purpose of the study is to examine the tourist experiences and meanings attached to the carnival of Limassol in Cyprus. A phenomenological research approach was employed to examine the representation of the destination in the

meanings and experience of event tourists and how this affects their future tourism behavior. Specifically, the study investigates the ways that meanings extracted from the carnival characterize the tourist experience. On this basis, it identifies the elements that instantiate the characteristics and qualities of Limassol/Cyprus and can be leveraged to build its tourism product mix and destination image. This exploratory research inquiry highlights the need to start exploring systematically the relationship between the meanings of tourist experiences and the characteristics of a destination's product mix in terms of their interaction effects and enhancement of synergies within the context of community and tourism development driven by events.

## **2. Locating Dramaturgy and Liminality in Event Tourism**

### **2.1 Making Sense of the Formation and Effects of Event Meanings**

The core phenomenon of event tourism is the nature of lived experiences and the meanings attached to them (Getz, 2008). The characteristics and qualities of an experience shape the meanings for people. Even though an experience is the same for event tourists, it can be experienced and interpreted in different ways, hence, rendering different meanings for them that are imbued by subjective significance and consequently affect their consumption choices. This makes it essential to understand the ways that meaning is shaped as a result of the event tourists' interaction with the experience being offered by the event in a tourism destination. In doing so, the characteristics that make an experience meaningful for event tourists can be better understood so that event elements and activities along with associated destination attractions are effectively designed and leveraged to magnify the impact of an event experience.

Meaning is a fundamental and universal concept in the realm of epistemological and ontological inquiries. It is generally defined as the ‘individual signification or the internal symbolization, representation, and conceptualization of the external world’ (Gergen, 1994, p. 19). Meanings in events include all experiences, feelings and thoughts as well as the subsequent sense of salience that people obtain from their participation in, or attendance at, event-based activities. Events as cultural performances are often patterned by culture to manifest local values and meanings, as Geertz’s (1973) classical account of the Balinese cockfight demonstrates. According to this account, the interpretation of the rituals and rites in an event can help people appreciate the local cultural structures through which natives of a host community shape meanings and manifest their beliefs and values. On this basis, it is suffice to say that behaviors of event tourists are influenced, motivated and expressed at the level of meanings that are structured by the interaction between tourists’ cultural background and the manifestation of a destination’s cultural context. In other words, event tourists interpret the meaning of event elements, symbols as well as the destination’s associated characteristics and attractions that express local values according to their own cultural frame. As such, an understanding of event meanings may shed light on the grounding cultural forces that determine event tourist experiences.

To understand the formation and effects of event meanings, Ziakas and Costa (2012, p. 32) put forward the concept of event dramaturgy, defined as ‘the extraction of shared meanings enabled by the projection and/or performance of symbolic representations in an event’s activities’. They based this definition on Goffman’s (1959) notion of dramaturgy as a mode of symbolic action that explains social behavior and Turner’s (1969, 1974) conceptualization of event performances as forms of rituals and social dramas that are expressed on the collective level. Generally, dramaturgy is a theatrical metaphor of the expressive practices being performed by

people based on cultural values, norms, and expectations revealing, thus that social interaction is dependent upon time, place, and audience (Goffman, 1959).

The conceptualization of event dramaturgy links performative behavior with the making of social order. It exemplifies that the performances unfolded in events are meta-commentaries, texts within metaphoric messages that respond to the problematics of public discourse and substantiate the symbolic foundations of social ordering. However, event dramaturgy can be criticized as making different events look homogeneous in the building of community, while, in fact, events may point to different directions such as maintaining the status quo in a host community or trying to subvert it. Furthermore, the interpretation of symbolic meaning inevitably bears subjectivity since it relies on abstract analysis of symbols, which may be interpreted in different ways. Nonetheless, a dramaturgical perspective is useful for studying the ways events and their elements or symbols exemplify expressive and dramatic dimensions (Schechner, 2003) that shape a symbolic context in which people interpret the order of conditions that make up their lived experiences.

Guided by this conceptual lens, Ziakas and Costa (2010) examined the case of the Water Carnival, an annual celebration in the rural community of Fort Stockton, Texas, which features synchronized swimming and theatrical acts in the format of a show all exclusively staged, produced and performed by local people. They demonstrated how the dramaturgic nature of the event enables its significance for tourists, particularly former residents, which thereby contributes to the event's value to the community by creating a symbolic social space characterized by identification with local history, heritage and values/beliefs and a sense of community reconnection, as well as acknowledgement and recognition. The authors noted that the organic interrelatedness of these mechanisms, enhanced by the sporting and theatrical

elements present in the event, facilitates the regeneration and reinforcement of a heightened sense of community and a strengthening of the community's social capital. This example illustrates that community events can become pivotal symbolic social spaces that bridge and bond people when they have dramaturgic qualities that express the elemental grounds of local cultural fabrics and generate threads of shared meaning.

Within the context of tourism destinations, however, little is known about how the interaction between tourists and local residents shape dramaturgy and the resulting meanings that are extracted from an event. Since tourists and locals represent different cultural frames, stakeholder interests (e.g., producers vs. consumers), and associated viewpoints, their interaction engenders multifaceted outcomes that may easily change in the process of crystallizing the nature and content of event meanings. As Brissett and Edgley (2005) noted in their analysis of dramaturgy, meaning is a continually problematic accomplishment of human interaction and it is fraught with change, novelty, and ambiguity. For example, Crespi-Vallbona and Richards (2007) in analyzing the discourse on cultural festivals from the perspective of local stakeholders involved in traditional and popular culture events in Catalonia, found that stakeholders tend to differ in the meanings attached to concepts such as identity, with policymakers exhibiting a greater emphasis on economic and political issues, whereas cultural producers are more concerned with social aspects of identity. The complexity and possible incongruity in the meanings attached to events may be increased if the tourists' perspectives are added in the multifaceted mosaic of event meanings.

The interaction of tourists and local people can be viewed from the perspective of globalization forces acting upon localization processes. In this regard, tourists through their needs and wants represent the homogenizing forces of globalization,

while locals strive to meet tourism demands but at the same time maintaining their distinctiveness and authenticity that makes them attractive in the eyes of tourists and the global market. The extent to which there is polarization or a creative synthesis can be revealed in the meanings extracted from event dramaturgy for tourists and local stakeholders. Events as sources of group and place identity (De Bres & Davis 2001; Derrett, 2003; Green & Chalip, 1998) have to both adapt in, and withstand the processes of globalization and commodification, which could result in loss of local identity, authenticity and meaning (Rubenstein, 1990; Stewart, 1986; Waterman, 1998). This highlights the ontological essence of events as contested terrains of meaning (Brennan-Horley, Connell, & Gibson, 2007; Jeong & Santos, 2004; Quinn, 2003), in which different groups of stakeholders position their viewpoints to be contested or synthesized. The end product of this process is revealed by the meanings that are extracted from an event and are interpreted, in turn, in each stakeholder's own terms.

Carnivals often become contested places that ostensibly reveal the tensions between modernization vs. tradition, commercialization vs. socio-cultural scope and globalization vs. localization. These tensions bear implications for the perceived authenticity of carnivals as they transform their originally conceived character and qualities. For example, Stewart's (1986) discussion of the carnival in Trinidad documented that whereas in the past the festival construed an alternate context with reflexive and rebellious potentials, it eventually became an extension of a modernizing process for tourism development.

Further, Gotham (2005) in examining the case of the Mardi Gras celebration in New Orleans showed that the simultaneous processes of globalization and localization interact in the realm of tourism engendering a mix of influences that

shape the social units through which people communicate, appropriate symbols and create cultural meanings to reinforce place differences, maintain local character, and construct new forms of local uniqueness. From this perspective, the protean nature of event meanings can be captured by analyzing the interplay between the factors and the diverse conditions that facilitate their nurturing within a particular contextual environment. In this context, the cultivation of event dramaturgy is facilitated by the liminality of an event wherein social taboos, norms and hierarchies are suspended and alternative social constructions are explored. Therefore, the understanding of the intersection between event dramaturgy and liminality can enable event and destination marketers to leverage meanings and characteristics for designing meaningful event experiences, and hence, enhancing the tourism product of a destination. To do so, the fundamental matter rests on how event experiences can be best modeled and appreciated.

## **2.2 Modeling and Designing Event Experiences**

The creation and delivery of consumer experiences has occupied a central role in the marketing and management of services. In their examination of the emergence of experiential marketing, O'Sullivan and Spangler (1999) argued that consumer offerings need to be enhanced, infused and ultimately made to successfully connect with people. A marketing framework for customer experience should then focus on five dimensions, namely, sense, feeling, thinking, acting and relating connected with implementation components such as spatial environments, communications and people (Berridge, 2007). In this way, experiences can then be infused with special or novel qualities of experience that people can immerse themselves in (O'Sullivan & Spangler, 1999). Similarly, Pine and Gilmore (1999) contended that staging



experiences is not about entertaining customers; it is about engaging them on any number of four dimensions, which are delineated in the notion of the 'experience realm': passive, active, immersion or absorption. Thus, designing experiences should be a strategic act aimed at engaging consumers in one of or a combination of these dimensions of experience involvement.

On these grounds alike, the perspective of a dramaturgical metaphor has been used in marketing and management to help better design consumption experiences (e.g., Grove, Fiske, & Bitner, 1992; Morgan, Watson, & Hemmington, 2008; Nelson, 2009). These attempts highlight the components of atmospherics and servicescapes to create an environment wherein the experience of consumption unfolds in an interactive theatrical setting. This requires the construction of the relationship between individual consumers and their physical setting consisting of elements such as the physical layout, furniture, décor and other artifacts that help set the stage of a consumption experience as a dramatic performance. Similarly, within the context of events, Berridge (2007) employed a dramaturgical metaphor suggesting that both the stage (setting) and performance (the entire experience) must be carefully crafted and designed. Berridge argued that experiential design and marketing principles must be applied to all aspects of event planning and implementation with the purpose to create desired perceptions, cognition and behavior.

How then can an event experience be better understood? According to Getz (2008), event experiences should be conceptualized and studied in terms of three inter-related dimensions: what people are doing, or behavior (the 'conative' dimension), their emotions, moods, or attitudes (the affective' dimension), and cognition (awareness, perception, understanding). In the same vein, Getz (2012) developed a model of the planned event experience, which provides a holistic

understanding of the event tourism experience, from the needs, motivations, attitudes and expectations brought to the events, through the actual living experience that shapes event meanings and influences future behavior. This model emphasizes the central role of liminality that epitomizes the character of an event as a special place in a special time outside the routine and restrictions of normal life. This thesis is in accordance with Falassi's (1987) notion of festivity as a time that is 'out of ordinary time'. As Getz (2008) observed, essentially, people willingly travel to, or enter into an event-specific place for defined periods of time, to engage in activities that are out of the ordinary and to have experiences that transcend the ordinary.

Consequently, Getz (2008) recommends as a starting point for the holistic understanding of the event tourism experience, the notion of liminality, which has been found to be pertinent to both travel and event experiences (Ryan, 2002). Liminality originates from anthropological work, which defined as liminal the events that provide a communal space where event participants share an overtly sacred experience (Turner, 1982, 1984). When this experience occurs in a secular space, it is defined as liminoid. The sense of communal bonding and camaraderie suspending normal social rules and boundaries that is engendered within those spaces was defined as *communitas* (Turner, 1974, 1982).

In the case of modern sport and cultural events, the function of liminality is overt: the celebratory nature of these events engenders a liminoid space wherein people feel more comfortable, uninhibited and are open to new ideas. When these events have ritualistic elements, they can foster feelings of separation from normal life, loss of identity and social status as well as encouraging role reversals particularly through a sense of *communitas*. For example, rituals (Lewis & Dowse-Magog, 1993) and rites of passage (Myerhoff, 1982) have been shown that have transforming and

healing effects on participants respectively, while carnivals enable the inversion of normal social roles and statuses (DaMatta, 1984). The synergy of different genres may optimize their effects on people and engender *communitas*. As MacAloon (1984) argued in the case of the Olympic Games, the different genres of the event (i.e., ritual, festival, game and spectacle) act upon another composing a ramified performance system that fosters *communitas* by transcending the political, racial, ethnic and linguistic boundaries that divide human beings from one another.

Liminality and *communitas* can be deliberately planned in events as the strategic approach of social leverage suggests. This approach has been introduced by Chalip (2006) to foster the social value of sport events by enabling and amplifying liminality and *communitas*. According to this approach, event elements and activities should foster social interaction and prompt a feeling of celebration. In this fashion, narratives, symbols, meanings, and emotional impact can be designed so that they facilitate the creation and enhancement of liminality and *communitas*. O'Brien and Chalip (2008) elaborated a social leveraging framework by suggesting certain strategies and tactics as well as noting that there are synergies with the economic leverage of sport events. From this standpoint, therefore, leveraging strategies should prescribe the use of elements in event design that create opportunities for enhancing the experiences and meanings of audiences, participants and tourists, thereby obtaining and magnifying the social or economic ends of an event.

What are the interaction effects of event dramaturgy and liminality on the experiences and meanings of event tourists and how, in turn, can these be leveraged to optimize the tourism product mix of a destination? To shed light on this question, it is imperative to examine the essence of tourists' lived experiences in events. Phenomenology provides a sound framework for studying the experiences and

meanings of event tourists and can help identify the elements that instantiate the characteristics and qualities of a host destination.

### **3. Phenomenology and Consumer Research**

Phenomenology is a philosophical movement and research methodology that deals with the examination and the meanings of specific phenomena as they are experienced and perceived (Santos & Yan, 2010). Phenomenology deals with studying the experience from the view of the individual, while the phenomenological methods are based in a paradigm of personal knowledge and subjectivity, and pay attention to the significance of personal standpoint and interpretation (Lester, 1999). In this respect, all the variables outside the immediate experience need to be neglected while the external world must be studied by examining the contents of personal consciousness (Groenewald, 2004). Realities are thus treated as pure ‘phenomena’ and the only absolute data from where to begin (Husserl, 1970).

Phenomenology as a methodological approach aims to create deep understanding of direct experiences that are based on conscious actions, underlining also the important determinants and characteristics. The phenomenological perspective has been effectively applied on the fields of marketing and consumer research (e.g., Churchill & Wertz, 1985; Goulding, 2004; Thompson, 1997, 1998), while in the tourism realm it is not widely utilized even though it can be a significant tool for understanding tourists’ experiences as a number of studies aptly demonstrates (Andriotis, 2009; Hayllar & Griffin, 2005; Li, 2000; Masberg & Silverman, 1996; Noy, 2008; Santos & Yan, 2010; Uriely, Yonay, & Simchai, 2002). More surprisingly, phenomenological studies are sparse on the field of events despite their

ostensible potential to uncover layers of meaning in the experiences of event attendees.

Although there are different phenomenological approaches (i.e., transcendental, hermeneutic, existential), the significance of existential-phenomenology for consumer and event tourism research is pivotal due to its ability to explore and designate multifaceted phenomena from a first-person perspective (Fahlberg, Fahlberg, & Gates, 1992; Thompson, Locander, & Pollio, 1989). In this respect, existential-phenomenology as part of the experiential paradigm contributes highly to the understanding of the lived experiences of tourists and visitors on the real-complex environment/world shedding light to the exploration of the tourist experience. More recently, Lindberg (2009) drawing primarily from Heidegger's classical work 'Being and Time' (1927/1996) proposed a perspective labeled 'ontological consumer research', which seeks to explore and develop an alternative understanding of what it means to be a human being within commercial contexts and situations. By applying this perspective on wilderness canoe tourists, Lindberg explored the role of this consumption experience within the lifeworld of tourists and the manner in which the tourists were transformed throughout experiences. This meta-theoretical perspective by focusing on the meaning of being could supplement the existing approaches of the experiential paradigm in the study of tourist experiences.

In general, the analysis of tourist experience can be met in the literature in three main schools of thought: (a) experience and consumption, where experience is defined according to its significance for individuals and their societies and involves the sense of authenticity, (b) the relationship between experience, motivation and tourist types, and (c) the experience-behavior nexus, where the experience is seen as a multifunctional leisure activity that engages all the senses (Shaw & Williams, 2004).

The authors conclude that these dimensions sometimes overlap and in order for the tourist experience to be fully understood, it is necessary to make sense of the complex factors that shape it. Likewise, Cohen's (1979) phenomenological distinction between five types of tourist experiences, namely recreational, diversionary, experiential, experimental, and existential suggests that a comprehensive understanding of the tourist experience should be based on the place and significance of tourist experience in the total world-view of tourists, their relationship to a perceived 'center' and the location of that center in relation to the society in which the tourist lives. According to Cohen, this continuum of tourist experience types is capable of reconciling and integrating the conflicting interpretations arising from other conceptual approaches.

Furthermore, from a consumer behavior standpoint, Antonides and van Raaij (1998) argue that the focus of consumption is to attain experience and emotions rather than purchasing products and brands. In this respect, the emphasis needs to be paid to the symbolic meanings of consumption, hedonism and expressive value. Indeed, there is a connection between experiences and client expectations and satisfaction. As Arnould and Price (1993) state, in studying hedonic experiences on commercial, multiday river rafting trips in the Colorado River basin, the relationship between expectations and satisfaction is complex. Their study found out that river rafting was viewed in the narratives of the individuals as an unforgettable, affectively charged experience, while experiential themes such as harmony with nature, *communitas*, and personal growth and renewal were significant in explaining the overall satisfaction. The authors conclude that the narrative of the rafting experience was central to overall evaluation while satisfaction had little to do with whether the experience unfolded as expected. This highlights the importance of examining the lived experiences and

meanings of individuals via the lens of a phenomenological conceptual and methodological framework.

#### **4. Applying a Phenomenological Methodology**

This study employed a phenomenological research approach in order to extract the meanings of event tourists that derive from their lived experience in attending the carnival of Limassol. Thus, the core phenomenon of this research is the experiences and meanings attached to them. As Hycner (1999) argued, the phenomenon dictates the method and the selection of appropriate informants. Given the paucity of research in this area, this study should be considered exploratory in nature. The Limassol carnival was selected as a case study for the following reasons: Limassol is a major destination of Cyprus and its carnival is one of the most important cultural events for the whole island. Tourists visiting Limassol incidentally during the carnival attend the event. This brings forth the issue of how the carnival in addition to its community role can become a core tourist attraction thereby enriching Cyprus' tourism product.

The respondents were located through purposive sampling (Patton, 2002; Zikmund, 2003) seeking for those who have had experiences relating to the phenomenon under study. There were used two sources for locating respondents. The first one was by approaching a travel agency in Limassol. The second one was by approaching international students of the ERASMUS program in the European University Cyprus. These sources were selected due to the nature of the visiting population that travels to Cyprus for a short period of time and attends the carnival incidentally. For this reason, the sampling was based on convenience by approaching one of the travel agencies in Limassol (that deals with many tourists coming from various countries) and soliciting students from one of the established universities on

the island. The targeted population from these sources supplies a common base of visitation during the off-season tourist period (in late winter-early spring) that the carnival takes place. Both groups of respondents comprise tourists who their visit to the carnival was not the primary purpose of their trip in Cyprus. This sampling approach fit the purpose of the study as it helped to locate appropriate respondents who were willing and able to describe their experience in the carnival. However, a limitation of this approach is that it did not include all the types of tourists visiting Limassol during the carnival, but instead, it sought to locate incidental carnival visitors in order for understanding their behavior and experience.

A balance in the number of respondents was sought between the two sources in order to ensure a variety of tourists who attend the carnival. Hence, two informants were selected from each source. In addition, snowball sampling (Babbie, 1995) was used to expand the sample by asking the respondents to recommend others for interviewing. Two more informants were selected from each source. In total, eight respondents were selected (Table 1) with the purpose to conduct unstructured in-depth phenomenological interviews. No more informants were selected as a considerable number of meanings emerged from the interviews that shed light on tourists' experience. Normally, this sample is adequate for phenomenological interviews that in general require up to ten interviewees (Boyd, 2001; Creswell, 1998).

#### [TABLE 1]

The students were interviewed in the authors' office and the other tourists were interviewed in their hotel and/or a cafeteria. Each interview lasted from two to three hours until the issues brought into light were exhausted. An initial interview was conducted in order to bracket the researchers' preconceptions and enter into the individual's lifeworld, thereby using the self as an experiencing interpreter (Miller &



Crabtree, 1992). This bracketing interview brought into the surface a number of issues that challenged the preconceptions of authors about the carnival. Since the authors attended the carnival in the past, which formed their preconceptions, observation was not employed as a method because it could compromise the reliance of authors on the informants' descriptions and subsequent interpretation of emerging issues.

Thus, the intent of interviews was to understand the phenomena in their own terms (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998) by providing a description of event tourist experiences as they are experienced by the tourists themselves. To do so, it is important to allow the qualitative material to emerge in order to capture rich descriptions of phenomena and their settings (Moustakas, 1994; Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997; Van Manen, 1990). This entails that interviewing is essentially an interchange of views between two persons where the researcher seeks to understand the world from the respondents' point of view and unfold the meaning of their experiences (Holloway, Brown, & Shipway, 2010; Kvale, 1996). For this reason, the interview questions were unstructured and open-ended in order to allow the respondents to describe and reflect on their experiences. Unstructured interviews draw on the social interaction between respondents and the interviewer to gather information. This form of interviewing allows flexibility and lets the researcher follow the interests, feelings and thoughts of the respondent (Fontana & Frey, 2005; Weiss, 1994). As such, the authors applied a cordially conversational style aimed to stimulate the respondents' reflections and interpretations, thereby capturing the meaning of their experiences. The following questions constituted the basis of interviewing focusing on the respondents' experiences, feelings, beliefs and convictions (Welman & Kruger, 1999) about their visit to the carnival:

- How did you experience the carnival?

- What did you like at the carnival?
- How did you feel at the carnival?
- What is your impression about Limassol and Cyprus after your experience in the carnival?

These questions were intentionally general as they aimed to surface tourists' own descriptions and interpretations of attending the carnival. Thus, respondents were encouraged to describe their lived experiences in the carnival by asking them, for instance, to account the chronological order of their activities in the event and explain particular incidents that affected positively or negatively their experiences. The narratives of respondents provided lengthy accounts whereby their feelings and thoughts were elicited, while probes and follow-up questions for clarification and elaboration were used to facilitate the flow of respondents' descriptions and interpretations (Table 2). This generated a substantive range of qualitative material with elaborative function and thus, the interviewing ended to the point that the accounts of respondents revealed a wide range of meanings that characterized overall their experiences.

#### [TABLE 2]

All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The resultant transcripts were not 'analyzed' in the conventional sense of qualitative research because the term 'analysis' is problematic in phenomenology. According to Hycner (1999), this term implies a breaking into parts, which may lead to a loss of the whole phenomenon. Instead, Hycner suggested the term 'explicitation' of the qualitative material since this means an investigation of the constituents of a phenomenon while keeping the context of the whole. Therefore, Hycner's explicitation process was used to extract meanings and themes that emerged purely from the qualitative material.

Explicitation entailed first, bracketing and phenomenological reduction where each author listened repeatedly to the recorded interviews in order to become familiar with the interviewees' words and tone of expression, and hence, develop a holistic understanding of the described phenomena and respondents' meanings. Second, the authors returned to the transcripts to delineate units of meaning by extracting statements that were seen to illuminate their experiences in the carnival. Third, clusters of themes were formed by grouping units of meaning together to determine central themes that revealed the essence of the clusters. Fourth, each interview was summarized incorporating all the quotes and themes elicited from the qualitative material to describe the holistic context of the carnival experience. A validity check was conducted by showing to the respondents their interview summary to determine whether the essence of described experiences and meanings was correctly captured. Their feedback was in complete agreement with the interview summary. Finally, the authors identified common themes in most of the interviews and individual differences, which were reported in a composite summary elaborating the thematic structure and the context from which the themes emerged (Table 3). The common themes revealed patterns of meaning that epitomized the emergence of interrelated thematic units and exemplified the dramaturgical states as an organic whole intertwining the tourists' interpretation of carnival symbolisms and their interaction with hosts and the broader environment.

[TABLE 3]

## **5. The Phenomenology of Event Tourist Experiences in Limassol Carnival**

The meanings of tourist experiences in Limassol carnival were found to be extracted as continuously evolving products within the context of two interrelated

dramaturgical states, namely the sociality and metamorphosis, and the interfering dimension of obstruction. Sociality characterizes the fostering of social interaction and enhancement of community spirit as evidenced by increased sociability and a sense of community. Metamorphosis epitomizes the community transformation that the destination undergoes through the carnival as evidenced by the thematic units of reflexivity and perceived community identity. Obstruction refers to both organizational aspects that constrain the tourist experience in the carnival and local limitations of the host city. Whilst the dramaturgical states along with the consequences of obstruction were experienced, perceived and interpreted differently by individual respondents, it appears that their interaction effects shape the lived experiences of tourists and their attached meanings. In this section, the analysis describes the thematic units of the dramaturgical states and the obstruction dimension.

## **5.1 Sociality**

Most respondents indicated that they experienced spontaneous and sociable interaction with other people during the carnival. This was further enhanced by a heightened sense of community, which was engendered by the event. Most respondents perceived and described what it meant to them the experience of being part or attending the community spirit that the carnival created.

### **5.1.1 Sociability**

Vassilissa, a first-time visitor to the carnival, described her experience about her interaction with other people in the event:

A lot of people were taking pictures of guys who were wearing costumes and there were friendly with each other. [...] They were saying ‘can I take picture of you because you have a nice costume?’, and others responded ‘yes, of course’ and they were chatting. A lot of people came to take a picture of me and it was very funny.

On these grounds, Vassilissa described the sociable atmosphere in the carnival:

Even though there was a lot of traffic which usually makes people stressed and nervous that day everybody was friendly, they were opening windows, honking to each other, screaming, and taking picture of everyone. You could feel that everybody was in a very good mood.

Likewise, Jordan reported that he had the chance to interact with many people within the sociable context of the carnival:

It was a very unique and different experience. The atmosphere was colorful, friendly, open [...] and I had the chance to talk to people. I met many 'crazy' people from different places in the parade and made some friends [...] I had a lot of fun taking pictures and chatting about their costumes and how much funny they were.

Precious who attended for the first time the carnival was amazed by the sociable atmosphere of the event and expressed her willingness to visit again in the future:

When we arrived [the parade] was about to finish. We were a bit late. We were waiting for other friends that were coming from Larnaca. When we got there, there were people walking. We were just looking at the stands just passing the people. Everyone was in a happy mood, which actually made the atmosphere to be warm.

And,

The atmosphere was a happy one. The people looked happy and they enjoyed what they were doing. It was a magical experience. It looked real! You couldn't tell that those people were wearing costumes and I really loved that. It's a first time experience and I wouldn't mind going back again.

The experience of Raafat who attended the carnival several times highlighted the fact that its celebratory character has the capacity to bring together many people and unite them temporarily along a common purpose:

The carnival was for all ages, not only the young but also old people and little children. It's nice to see all people together. I like how people join together. The carnival is a moment and place where people come together.

Along the same lines, Raafat described that the celebratory atmosphere of the event extended beyond the limited confines of the carnival's space and time:

When I was returning to Nicosia, after the parade, many people were returning in their cars and they were singing, screaming, it was like they

wanted to bring the carnival to Nicosia, to continue the celebration. It was like a fest in the street.

Also, Raafat pointed out the presence of many tourists in the carnival and the opportunity he had to interact with them:

[...] A lot of English people. We talked with them. They came for ten days to Cyprus, like that. They wanted to see the place around. [...] I met many people who were there with their kids. These people were not from Limassol, they were from Nicosia, from Paphos, around. They said that they brought the kids to see the carnival. All of them were dressed. [...] There were a lot of Russian people. I could identify them because my friend, she was talking to the Russian people.

As all the above quotes of the respondents demonstrate, the carnival's festive atmosphere generated opportunities for social interaction and prompted a robust feeling of sociability. Thus, the celebratory nature of the carnival created a spatial-temporal context within which the experiences of tourists were unfolded and a shared sense of community was fostered.

### **5.1.2 Sense of community**

The sense of community created by the carnival can be traced on the consolidation of the host community's collective self-esteem, which enables attendees to experience a feeling of belongingness and kinship. As Astrid explained:

I felt like I was [in my] home. The whole celebration was so welcoming that I didn't feel like a foreigner. All people were excited, they were singing, dancing and laughing.

Or, as Jordan mentioned:

What I really liked is that I felt like I was among known people. The carnival of Limassol is smaller than other carnivals in Europe and it makes you become more part of the community, it isn't impersonal. I met several people of various nationalities.

Similarly, Linda accounted the inclusion and representation of many nationalities in the carnival:

They had many nationalities in the carnival showing different traditions in the parade, so this made a really multi-cultural environment where everyone could feel part of a big welcoming family.

It appears that the carnival is a unique opportunity to bring people together, make them communicate and exchange ideas, and hence, enhance their overall experience from the event and improve tourists' perceptions about the city. Toward this direction, experiential design can be employed to add atmospheric elements and activities in the Limassol carnival that engage hosts and visitors with the environment, foster their interaction, generating thus a deeper level of emotional engagement and thereby creating stronger bonds among hosts, visitors and the environment. Notwithstanding that this can substantially enrich and intensify the overall tourist experience, the lack of strategic planning constrains the implementation of experiential design to reach this potential.

Additionally, the word 'family' was mentioned by several respondents in describing the feeling of inclusiveness and belongingness they experienced at the carnival. Precious articulated this feeling:

I really felt I was part of their society and not a foreigner. No one was staring at me like what are you doing here. Sometimes I feel that in Cyprus. It depends on where I am. In that moment I felt like I was part of a huge family, a huge community and this was beautiful. I really felt like it was a huge family and I am part of that family. I loved it!

Finally, Kyriakos was a respondent who participated in the parade last year but this year attended the carnival as a spectator. His account explains the more intense experience one can get from actively participating in the carnival rather than being a spectator:

Last year I participated but this year I was a spectator. For me the carnival this year was a bit boring in comparison with last year. To be in the parade in a cart doesn't have any relationship than being just a spectator. When you actively participate [in the carnival] the time runs fast and you get the

energy of the people. This is a magnificent experience. You walk so many kilometers -that if you walked them normally [outside the carnival] you would be exhausted and without energy- and you don't even feel tired [...] you are full of energy because you receive this 'something' that the participation gives you. [...] You see the spectators to be happy, their smiles and applauses. This motivates you to continue and you feel accepted.

As the above quote highlights, the active participation in the carnival can intensify the experience of tourists and potentially foster *communitas*. The descriptions of respondents recognize that experienced a valued sense of community but this is not an evidence of *communitas*, which do not appear to be experienced and reported in this study by the tourists. However, as illustrated by the respondents, it seems that tourists would probably enjoy participating in the carnival, which could significantly enhance their overall experience. Hence, it is important that carnival organizers provide and promote opportunities for tourists who would like to participate in the carnival by leveraging liminality and fostering *communitas*. This could build and amplify a multifaceted community meaning created by the interaction between guests and hosts that would enhance the value and impact of the carnival on people.

Overall, the sociality experienced by the respondents is evidenced by the sociability and a sense of community that were fostered within the liminoid spatial-temporal context of the carnival. This constitutes the ground of the dramaturgic nature of the event that can enable the meaning and significance of projected symbolisms to event attendees. On this basis, the core performative and symbolic elements of the carnival can effectively operate and interact, hence, enhancing their meaning and impact on people. It should also be noted that the respondents indicated that the carnival provides an opportunity for transforming themselves. While generally the inherent carnival ethic is to achieve the reversal of social roles and statuses, from an event tourism standpoint the issue is how this can be most effectively enabled and



amplified. As evidenced in this study, the sense of belongingness the tourists (as temporary constituents) experience through sociality can attain this end. Hence, the carnival can become a versatile vehicle for integrating effectively tourists (though temporarily) into the celebratory environment of the host community, enhance their experience and create strong connections with them.

## **5.2 Metamorphosis**

The dramaturgical state of metamorphosis embodies the core symbolisms and meanings of the attendees' experience in the carnival epitomizing the community transformation that the host destination undergoes during the event. This can be illustrated by analyzing the thematic units of reflexivity and perceived community identity.

### **5.2.1 Reflexivity**

A way to understand the meanings and appeal of the carnival to outsiders is to examine the reflexivity of tourists. This includes the interpretations of tourists according to their personal perspectives and cultural frames. For example, Vassilissa interpreted the political meanings exhibited in the carnival, which increased her understanding of what happens in Cyprus:

I liked the parade a lot because people by doing all those cars and costumes they have an opportunity to express themselves. In other countries people protest, people do strikes but in Cyprus people say something through the parade. People are having fun, they dance but at the same time with their costumes they express something that they want to change in Cyprus. For example, they had umbrellas and there was money on them and a sign said that 'before when we had a lot of money we put umbrellas and now we don't'. Basically, this is a statement that people are not very happy with the government and are worried about the economic crisis that affects Cyprus as well. So people expressed their worries, there were some signs about the taxes that they increased them, that there were no jobs, about the [natural] gas that is coming and it is going to change the whole situation. And another thing was the truth about driving in Cyprus, there was one sign 'don't drink and drive' and it was very impressive

because they put a real car destroyed by the drunk driver and there was a guy sitting with a bottle of whiskey on top [...] another thing about driving was [that] they had a lot of kids in various cars holding signs saying that it's very important to know the rules before you drive.

In contrast, Precious expressed her lack of understanding about what exactly the carnival entailed:

Even though the carnival is interesting I still question why it's done, why it's celebrated [...] because it's something new to me. Unfortunately, I didn't have someone that I felt comfortable enough to ask why are you dressed like this? It's a question that I still have now.

And,

For all of us it was a first time experience. In Africa, at least in my country and the countries that my friends come from, we don't have carnivals. It was really interesting and if it was possible I would love to bring my family and my friends so they get to experience and see how nice it is. They must see the real environment, the way people get dressed, the music that is played, the parade, the presentations, basically everything. I will also tell them to come earlier as soon as it starts or even days before in order to get the experience of everything, not just the last part but everything.

This confusion that the respondent stated could perhaps be avoided if strategic planning was employed in the design of the carnival. In this regard, experiential marketing could be used to enhance the image of the carnival and Limassol by embodying in the event the unique characteristics of the city and epitomizing its transformation during the carnival. Pertinent symbols could be layered throughout the event in synergy with theming used in the city and local businesses, while narratives in the media could clarify those themes and messages to the visitors. More importantly, social leverage of the carnival could capitalize on the symbols and meanings of the event to enable the creation and enhancement of liminality and *communitas*.

For Raafat who revisited the carnival and was thus more familiar with its context it was much easier to critically interpret and understand the elements and symbolisms of the event:

This year I saw new ideas. For instance, there was a cart with people from Arab countries, I think from Saudi Arabia, and they were throwing fake Euros to the public [...] they wanted to show that the foreign investments will save Cyprus economy. They make funny stuff about something that is a problem. They want to show to people that we have problems, we don't have money and through funny things the note the situation. They make funny stories out of real problems. They want to show that if you have too many problems it is an opportunity [the carnival] to forget them.

Finally, Kyriakos recollected his experience and meanings of the carnival as follows:

The political meanings were related to what's happening now in the political scene of the country. All of them had to do with the natural gas, the President of Cyprus, the crisis [...] the headlines. For instance, I remember a cart that illustrated the sea platform for the natural gas that the government tries to find in Cyprus. On the platform there were the politicians that were involved in the investment, with this story. The relationship between the ex-minister and respective ministry for the natural gas were not the best and the cart was mocking them.

As the interview findings demonstrate, the interpretation of the carnival meanings by the tourists enables their significance for them, which can, in turn, contribute to the enhancement of their overall experience and connection with the host community. In this regard, it is essential for carnival organizers to build symbols in the event in ways that these can be easily understood by outsiders.

### **5.2.2 Perceived community identity**

What is the identity of Limassol and Cyprus to the eyes of tourists as a result of the projection of its characteristics through the carnival? Does it change or get improved? In this respect, Vassilissa explained:

I really-really liked that Cypriots participate in the parade, you see families with small kids, friends, everyone together. You see how important it is for them because you see that the costumes are not easy to do, they have spent time, they have spent money [...] you see that it is very important for them and that everybody is together. [...] So the main things that I enjoyed in

the carnival were a lot of fun, positive atmosphere, music and meeting a lot of people and that's why I like Limassol and I am planning to go again soon.

And,

[The carnival is] a lot fun, music, nice atmosphere, everybody coming together but this is also the time that people are able to express themselves [...] and the good thing about Cyprus is that they do it in a nice way, they don't go to burn houses, they don't strike so badly [...] and the authorities allow people to express their views and disappointment about the government.

Further, Vassilissa noticed the use of theming that was employed by local businesses aimed to amplify the celebratory atmosphere:

In every club, bar and restaurant you could see places decorated all over with carnival themes. So, basically if you had the chance to go anywhere you would find something related to the carnival and besides everybody was dressed for two days.

Linda based on her experience made a direct link between the carnival and its effects on the image of the island:

The image of Cyprus is better because of the carnival. The carnival did change the image for me that I didn't know much about Cyprus [...] it gave me an opportunity to interfere with the environment inside the country, appreciate what is going on and learn something about how the Cypriots feel and entertain, so my perception about Cyprus has changed and become more familiar.

However, in terms of the carnival elements and characteristics, Linda pointed out whether the current form delivers the right set of purposes that could build and promote the identity of Cyprus:

[The carnival] is more like a parade, what you see is that people go and say what they want to say, yes they dance and they have fun but is this all what a carnival is about? They use it to fight their government and not to make people proud of their culture and nation.

Astrid explained her understanding of Cyprus after her experience in the carnival:

The carnival helps to show how Cyprus is and what Cyprus stands for. [...] It is a relaxing place with laid-back people that they know how to have a lot of fun. [...] When I was talking to some of my friends [back home] I told them that it would be an opportunity to be part of this. When you come to Cyprus you see how people live but you are not involved. The

carnival is an opportunity to be involved, to be part of that society, to be part of that family, to experience them, to hear a bit of Cypriot music, to see them dancing. So, I told them it would be a good opportunity for them to experience that and they won't regret that decision to come and be part of it.

And regarding Limassol Astrid said:

I think that Limassol is an amazing tourist resort/town. I've been to Limassol before but because of the carnival I think I like the city even more. I think they should advertise it even more to other places because before I came to Cyprus I only know about Ayia Napa, not really about Limassol. Now I know that Limassol is a beautiful place, it has the seaside and it's a place that they do the carnival, an important cultural event.

Likewise, Precious and Marco respectively expressed their positive perception about Limassol after visiting the carnival:

I think it was a good idea that they chose Limassol [for the carnival]. It's a good place to stage a carnival like that. It's different, better than Nicosia, because you also have the opportunity to be in touch with nature, to see nature as it is, to be in a natural environment like seeing the landscape, the beach, the water and just the friendliness of the city. The people are also different, more open, more friendly. The feeling is different and I like it. [...] Cypriots are friendlier when they are having events and you can learn more about their culture if you go to more events.

And,

I liked the friendliness of the people. I felt I am part of that. I also like the music they played and the way it was organized, because it was a lot of traffic there but the police managed to keep everything under control, the traffic was organized, the parade itself and the way that people were dressed and just the atmosphere. That's what I loved the most from the carnival. [...] To me, Limassol is a tourist place and generally through the carnival I could see the cultural character of the city. [...] I think that the carnival promotes Cyprus and the Cypriot people in general. For someone who doesn't know about them the carnival will give him a picture.

It appears that the contribution of the carnival is evident to the overall formation of Limassol's tourist image. Towards this direction, strategic planning should incorporate the carnival as an integral part of the city's tourism product, while communication schemes should underline the uniqueness of such an event and its relationship to the overall culture and history of the city. By using experiential

marketing techniques the meanings and symbols of the place could be transferred easier to the visitors and would help them understand and appreciate more fully Limassol's culture.

Moreover, Raafat described the attractive characteristics of Limassol that are promoted through the carnival:

Limassol is a nice city for the carnival because of the seaside. Limassol is close to everything, Paphos, Nicosia, Troodos. [...] I am engaged and I said to my fiancé that next year we'll visit Cyprus for two things: one to see Troodos and the other to see the carnival. For me the carnival is one of the most important attractions of Cyprus.

Kyriakos explained the established characteristics of the carnival that have made it a long-standing tradition for the city of Limassol:

I liked the spirit of the carnival. You feel that there is tradition and history. It is something that comes out. You feel the experience, that there is a tradition of the carnival in Limassol. You know that it exists but you also feel it. It makes you feel confident. It shows you something old-fashioned but through this old-fashion you feel confident. You receive that the many people that participated have done this before and they know it. You feel that this is something known, you feel the contact. It's not something superficial but something profound and significant. It's not just a parade or people that walk. It's tradition, a piece of the life of Limassol, it's something more and with sentimental value.

The case of Kyriakos is illustrative of the valued experience a tourist can get when participates in the carnival. Kyriakos reflected on this experience:

The sweetest feeling is that I experienced something that I was watching at the TV. I had the opportunity this time to live it from the inside, to be part of the carnival. However, I didn't feel that I was part of Limassol because I am sure that when you are from Limassol and you grow up with this [the carnival] no one outside Limassol can feel like that. The carnival belongs to Limassol. People from there live it fully, if not the entire year, during the days of the carnival. I will never be 100% in this. This is something that I feel. When I was in the parade I felt that for that moment I was in this but I knew that when the carnival will finish I will go and I will no longer be part of that. On the other hand, people of Limassol are constantly in this, it is part of their life or probably their life is surrounded by the carnival.

And,

When you see at the TV the carnival of Rio or Venice you cannot compare them with that of Limassol but for Cyprus this is something unique, it belongs to Limassol. People of Limassol do take advantage of the Limassol but they could do more. There are not many changes all these years. There are small details that would enhance the carnival such as the safety issues or the fact that sometimes it looks really cheap. They could have more demanding criteria for the participants, to change the monotonous music that plays constantly all those years. I believe that they are afraid of the changes probably because the tradition and history of the carnival doesn't allow them to make something different, but this is a characteristic of Cyprus, generally. We are skeptic.

Overall, the identity and image of Limassol and Cyprus is enabled by the projection of the carnival and host community characteristics. As the interview findings illustrate, tourists value their experience in the carnival and perceive positively the attractive characteristics of Limassol and the whole island, which makes them willing to revisit Cyprus and the Limassol carnival.

### **5.3 Obstruction**

There are certain aspects that the respondents identified to constrain their overall experience in the carnival. These include the organizational aspects (Table 4) and the inherent limitations of the local socio-cultural fabric.

#### **[TABLE 4]**

Traffic along with over-crowdedness appeared to have an impact on the respondents' experience. In line with these constraints, the over-consumption of alcohol during the parade was also considered as a negative aspect of the carnival. Also, due to the plethora of people attending the carnival in conjunction with the relaxed safety line/distance measures undertaken, respondents mentioned safety issues that affecting negatively their overall experience. Finally, other elements that inhibited the respondents' experience were the lack of innovation, as mentioned the carnival is repeated for many years in the same format and thus has become

monotonous, as well as the lack of promoting the carnival as one of the main attractions of Limassol.

In terms of local limitations, most of the respondents expressed their disappointment about why Cyprus does not support and promote its culture through the carnival. For example, Vassilissa said:

Limassol is too foreign and not local. It's good that you see many foreign business people in Limassol but unfortunately, Cyprus does not fight back in the cultural matter [...] they let them put signs in foreign languages, they let them change the buildings, but they don't fight back, they don't say 'this is our country, please respect us'. For example, the main streets are not Cypriot anymore. And this is not only about Limassol, this is generally the situation in Cyprus.

And,

[Cypriots] they don't fight about their culture, they just want to express through the carnival their concerns about the economic situation and the government. For example, if you go to Brazil you will see in the carnival traditional dresses, music and dances but in Limassol I didn't see any. At the carnival I expected to see at least one group of people wearing national clothes and singing national songs but there was nothing.

In the same vein, Precious stated that she did not learn anything about the culture of Cyprus:

Except the dancing and the music I don't think that I learnt something about the culture of Cypriots. If I interacted more or if I participated more I would probably know more.

Also, Astrid pointed out that she would like to see more cultural elements in the carnival:

I'd like to see more cultural elements [in the carnival] for example, maybe traditional dresses and Cypriot music [...] to show things about Cyprus and portray the Cypriot culture.

In line with the previous respondents, Raafat emphasized the lack of cultural elements and subsequent character of the carnival:

The carnival does not show Cyprus. They don't show the Cypriot traditions and spirit. For example, there was a donkey [...] that's something from Cyprus [...] In the parade there was nothing from Cyprus,



nothing at all. For example, you could see people dressed like Brazilian people, or others that were Egyptians and danced. They were people from different cultures and they showed different ideas but I didn't see something from Cyprus. I was expecting to see the Cypriot traditions in the parade.

Indeed, cultural elements can be used to represent the identity and social fabric of a destination. For this reason, marketing management needs to integrate the Cypriot culture into the themes that the carnival projects and communicates. Through this way, the carnival would obtain a more special character providing the appropriate environment for people to experience a local sense of the community, an appreciation of its history as well as a more holistic understanding of the place.

## **6. Discussion**

Whereas it is well-documented in the literature across different disciplines that events have the capacity to strengthen social networks (e.g., Kemp, 1999; Walter, 1981) and foster the social capital of host communities (e.g., Arcodia & Whitford, 2006; Misener & Mason, 2006), as well as build group and place identity (e.g., De Bres & Davis, 2001; Derrett, 2003; Green & Chalip, 1998) and well-being (e.g., Falassi, 1987), there is little inter-disciplinary work that examines from a strategic standpoint the symbolic and social nature of events within the context of tourism destinations. This inquiry brings into the fore the experiential dimensions of event tourism that need to be fully understood in order to optimize the social and economic utility of events.

In this regard, the findings of this phenomenological study reveal the symbolic and social elements of the Limassol carnival that are epitomized in the heightened generalized sociality and perceived community metamorphosis experienced by the

tourists. As such, the findings illustrate the dramaturgic nature of the carnival, which is not commonplace in the event and tourism literatures, and hence highlight the need for employing a strategic approach aimed to leverage dramaturgy and liminality generated by events in host destinations. To this end, the study provides evidence on Ziakas and Costas's (2010, 2012) claim that focal community events can be understood as symbolic social spaces wherein people interpret the conditions that shape their lives in order to change them. This can be effectively accomplished when dramaturgy and liminality interact harmoniously fostering the symbolic and social essence of an event. In turn, this essence can be felt by the tourists, hence, intensifying their overall experience and enabling the significance of meanings for them. Thus, from an event tourism standpoint, it is important to facilitate the involvement of tourists in an event and their interaction with hosts so that the extracted meanings exemplify the destination's characteristics and create positive associations with its tourism product.

The carnival of Limassol is a unique occasion for the city and the island at large, to project its image through tourism. For tourists, Limassol is a mix of a resort and a city; it combines both natural heritage characteristics such as the coast and the sea, as well as cultural elements that make it an attractive urban destination. The Limassol carnival is more than an entertaining event that takes place every year in Cyprus. It constitutes one of the trademarks of the city, a gathering of people not only from all over the island but also tourists, an exchange of cultural philosophies and ideas, a meeting point of people, a celebration and an expression of attitudes and ideas. As this study shows, these meanings are conveyed to the tourists during these few days that this event occurs. Hence, this provides a unique opportunity for Limassol's event and destination managers to employ strategic planning and

experiential marketing tools in the carnival aimed at enhancing its appeal and meaning to tourists and thus promoting Limassol as a tourism destination.

In general, the scope of experiential marketing has to be more broadly positioned in event tourism since often the enhancement of tourist experiences stems from the social value an event derives for the hosts, which eventually is experienced by tourists. To do so, there is a need for a common strategic approach between event and destination managers for designing and delivering an event so that it enhances the overall event experience and is cross-leveraged to optimize intended tourism and social outcomes. In this context, the social leverage of events needs to be synergized with and/or incorporated into destination marketing and management plans. In other words, social leverage should coincide with economic/tourism leverage aimed to maximize the event benefits.

The synergistic social value and tourism potential of events is determined by their elements and characteristics. In general, carnivals have the capacity to function as places of contestation wherein different forces/perspectives are met, expressed, contested or synthesized. The findings of this study show that while Limassol's community identity is significantly enhanced as evidenced in the perceptions of tourists, little has been done to harness its tourism potential. Instead, the carnival is predominantly characterized by an ethic of celebration and entertainment that enables the expression of political commentaries and meanings. This narrow orientation of the carnival does not accommodate effectively the interests to exploit its tourism potential. As a result, the carnival is not incorporated into the host destination's tourism product, and subsequently, neither it is promoted as a tourist attraction nor it is used to promote Limassol's and the island's destination characteristics to event visitors. Clearly, a strategic approach is needed in order for making the carnival a core

tourist attraction. In doing so, a starting point is the understanding of the perspectives, experiences and meanings of tourists as the findings of this phenomenological study demonstrate. Such an understanding can facilitate event and destination managers to find the best means for designing and leveraging experiences and meanings that enhance the impact of the event on tourists.

Towards this direction, it would be useful to apply an expanded framework of existential phenomenology on event tourism. In this respect, Askegaard and Linnet (2011) argue for an epistemological positioning of consumer culture theory research beyond the lived experience of consumers. This expands the contextualization of lived consumer experiences by taking into consideration the systemic and structuring influences of market and social systems that is not necessarily felt or experienced by consumers and therefore not necessarily expressed. The authors referred to this approach as the context of context, which explicitly connects the structuring of macro-social explanatory frameworks with the phenomenology of lived experiences. From this perspective, a comprehensive understanding of the interacting factors (e.g., dramaturgy and liminality, market and community/destination characteristics) that shape event tourist experiences can be achieved. On this basis, the design of event elements and symbols as well as leveraging strategies can be grounded on the micro-social context accounted for by the tourist in a broader socio-historical context.

In terms of fostering social value, although the purpose of this study was not to examine the existence or not of liminality and *communitas*, the findings indicate the absence of *communitas* in the perceptions and experiences of tourists. This brings into the fore the nebulous and unexplored area of creating and leveraging *communitas* in event tourism settings to enhance their impact on the experience of tourists and the resulting meanings they extract. There are a few examples in the literature that

pinpoint evidence of *communitas*. Halewood (2006) in a study of participants in Viking festivals, concluded that group identity was fostered to the point of establishing a 'neo-tribal' community. Green and Chalip (1998) in studying a women football tournament demonstrated that the event was an occasion to parade and celebrate the football subculture.

Nevertheless, what seems to be unclear is the extent to which events generate a sense of community/identity or *communitas*. By belonging to a group or community and sharing a common identity does not equate to the totalizing essence of *communitas* that substantially connects and bonds disparate groups of people. In other words, where can the line be drawn between the sense of community and *communitas*, and based on what processes, characteristics and outcomes this distinction can be made? To remain faithful on Turner's original definition of *communitas*, a systematic rigor should be applied on exploring the essence and characteristics of groups and communities from the perspective of event tourists. In doing so, inquiries on the event experiences and associated meanings need to delineate the fabrics and patterns of the rich tapestry that the synergy of dramaturgy and liminality generate.

## **7. Issues and Implications**

A number of issues and implications emerge from the findings of this exploratory study. First of all, the practical implications of the study underline that by understanding the experiences of event tourists, event and destination managers can redesign events and improve the tourist offerings. The case of Limassol carnival constitutes a focal celebratory event that has the capacity to attract thousands of people every year. Yet, as the study indicates, several organizational matters affect the

overall experience of the attendees. Thus, aspects such as better control of traffic flows (both cars and people), safety issues and alcohol consumption need to be improved. Moreover, the themes, the music, and the parade of the carnival appear to be repetitive every year and therefore, need to be updated and redesigned.

Most importantly, due to the lack of strategic planning and marketing, the carnival has neither been designed nor promoted as a core attraction that can derive both social and economic/tourism benefits. A serious consequence of the lack of strategic planning is that the carnival does not project the Cypriot culture, since its multinational character impedes the local element to be projected. In this regard, the visitors of Limassol perceive a rather confusing message that the carnival is something between a local celebration of Cypriots and a multinational feast. Event and destination managers need to decide what scope and content want to give to the carnival and design appropriately the event. To this end, the social leverage and experiential marketing of the carnival have to be applied in concert under a comprehensive event tourism policy.

In general, it is evident that a strategic approach in event tourism needs to develop a joint framework for enabling a synergy between the social and economic leverage of events. To do so, however, there is a need to extend the study of event leverage from sport events, (which currently focuses on), to other genres. This endeavor can be significantly assisted by the application of the phenomenological perspective on the study of event tourism. This perspective can potentially enable destination marketing and management to develop a joint framework for cross-leveraging events and destination assets, hence, synergistically optimizing both social and tourism ends for host destinations.

In this context, the design of events should provide the conditions for the harmonious interaction of dramaturgy and liminality. We need to know more how this can be effectively done across different event genres. On these grounds, it is essential to know how the outcomes of dramaturgy and liminality can be evaluated. This entails identifying whether liminality and *communitas* are actually engendered in an event, and if this is the case, determining to what extent (and how) tourists can be engaged in this state, which increases their interaction with the hosts. In turn, it is important to know how the effects of this experience can be optimized in order for influencing the future behavior of tourists.

As this study illustrated, the application of phenomenology is of great help in investigating the meanings and experiences of event tourists. Yet, focusing on event tourism and synthesizing elements from the various phenomenological approaches requires that future inquiries explore how to operationalize phenomenology and determine what particular insights can be gained. This makes imperative to develop a research framework for applying phenomenology in event tourism and thus tackle the inherent challenge of this hybrid field where two kinds of experiences are met and merged: event attendee experience and tourist experience. In such a framework, a more systematic understanding of event meanings can be achieved shedding light eventually on the following issue: how can event meanings be leveraged to enhance their impact on tourists and promote a destination?

To conclude, the overarching contribution of this exploratory research to the study of event tourism experiences is that it brings into the fore the need to investigate in concert the interrelationships between the meanings of tourist experiences and the features of a destination's product mix. This encompasses an understanding of how symbolic event elements and their socio-cultural meanings impact upon the tourist

experience, their interaction effects and the subsequent development of synergies between community-based and tourism-focused event leveraging strategies.



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**Table 1. Profile of Interviewees**

<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Occupation</b>
1. Vassilissa	Russia	21	Female	Student
2. Jordan	Greece	24	Male	Student/Part-time employee
3. Raafat	Syria	27	Male	Full-time employee
4. Kyriakos	Cyprus	28	Male	Full-time employee
5. Astrid	Germany	31	Female	Student
6. Precious	Zimbabwe	23	Female	Student
7. Linda	UK	39	Female	Full-time employee
8. Marco	Netherlands	48	Male	Full-time employee



**Table 2. Indicative Probing and Follow-Up Questions**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Can you help me understand what you mean by .....?</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Let's focus on this issue. I would like to understand that better.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• This ..... can mean different things to different people. What exactly does it mean to you?</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How did that ..... make you feel?</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Was this important to you?</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What were your thoughts/feelings when you saw or did that?</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Can you describe this incident?</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What is your view about the carnival, Limassol and Cyprus now after your experience at the event?</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What do you remember most from the carnival? Why?</li></ul>

**Table 3. Thematic Structure of Extracted Meanings**

Central Theme	Sociality	Indicative Quotes
Sub-themes	Sociability	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Everyone was in a happy mood, which actually made the atmosphere to be warm.</li> <li>2. The atmosphere was colorful, friendly, open and I had the chance to talk to people.</li> <li>3. That day everybody was friendly.</li> </ol>
	Sense of Community	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I felt like I was home.</li> <li>2. What I really liked is that I felt like I was among known people.</li> <li>3. I really felt I was part of their society and not a foreigner.</li> </ol>

Central Theme	Obstruction
Subthemes	<p>Traffic</p> <p>Alcohol consumption</p> <p>Over-crowdedness</p> <p>Lack of innovation</p> <p>Safety</p> <p>Lack of promotion</p>

Central Theme	Metamorphosis	Indicative Quotes
Sub-themes	Reflexivity	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. People by doing all those cars and costumes they have an opportunity to express themselves.</li> <li>2. Even though the carnival is interesting I still question why it's done, why it's celebrated.</li> <li>3. The political meanings were related to what's happening now in the political scene of the country.</li> </ol>
	Perceived Community Identity	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I really liked that Cypriots participate in the parade, you see families with small kids, friends, everyone together.</li> <li>2. The carnival is a lot of fun, music, nice atmosphere, everybody coming together but this is also the time that people are able to express themselves.</li> <li>3. The image of Cyprus is better because of the</li> </ol>

		carnival.
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**Table 4. Organizational Aspects that Constrain the Tourist Experience in the Carnival**

Organizational aspects	Quotes
Traffic	Vassilissa: There was a lot of traffic. We spent a lot of time coming from the hotel to the parade and it took us more than an hour to go there [...] It is hard to control but it was a mess. It was very dirty and it has to do with people. Because I wouldn't throw a bottle, a glass or cigarettes on the floor. I would hold them on my hand until to find a bin. There were not enough bins. They should have tried to improve that. Jordan: Traffic was the greatest discomfort in Limassol during the carnival. It's very difficult to park. In a city that receives so many people during that time they should have also the appropriate infrastructure.
Alcohol consumption	Linda: It was too much to allow people drinking alcohol during the parade when they were walking. Because children see that and may think that it is okay to drink alcohol anytime and get drunk when they walk. Alcohol should not have been allowed in the parade.
Over-crowdedness	Raafat: To see the carnival was very hard. It was very crowded and some people were stuck in their cars because of the traffic for hours. The cafeterias were so busy, parking places were full. Kids wanted to eat or you wanted to have water and it was so full of people that you couldn't have them easily. Everything was so busy. These should be addressed. Linda: The sidewalks were not wide enough to fit all the people. Because in the sidewalks they put food and ice-cream vendors and there was no space left for the people to walk.
Lack of innovation	Kyriakos: It appears that the carnival needs to be updated. Except last time that I went, the previous time I went there was almost fifteen to twenty years ago. I cannot say that many things changes after so many years. I was expecting to see a different plan, something innovative, to see something changed. The only thing that I believe was changed, was that the serenaders which is historically part of the carnival, didn't participate this year [...] I believe that for the children is something nice but if you are an adult not. If you are in a cart in the parade is something different. I felt bored and that's why I left. The dresses weren't so good and then you watch at the TV, the Rio carnival that they have all these crazy things, and then you go to Limassol [...] I don't know, I wasn't excited by the colors or the quality. I saw some fantasy but I didn't see quality. I don't consider it as a carnival with quality [...] the decoration, the colors, the materials, the people, everything.
Safety	Kyriakos: This year I didn't like the fact there are many people that enter in front of the carts in the street. No one kept

	the safety line/distance that you need to have in order for the carts to move.
Lack of promotion	Linda: I didn't know about the carnival until I came here. I don't think it is well-known outside Cyprus. My friend learned about it by chance.